

FEAR GOD and DREAD NOUGHT

Volume III



The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet
LORD FISHER OF KILVERSTONE
Edited by Arthur J. Marder

FEAR GOD AND DREAD NOUGHT,

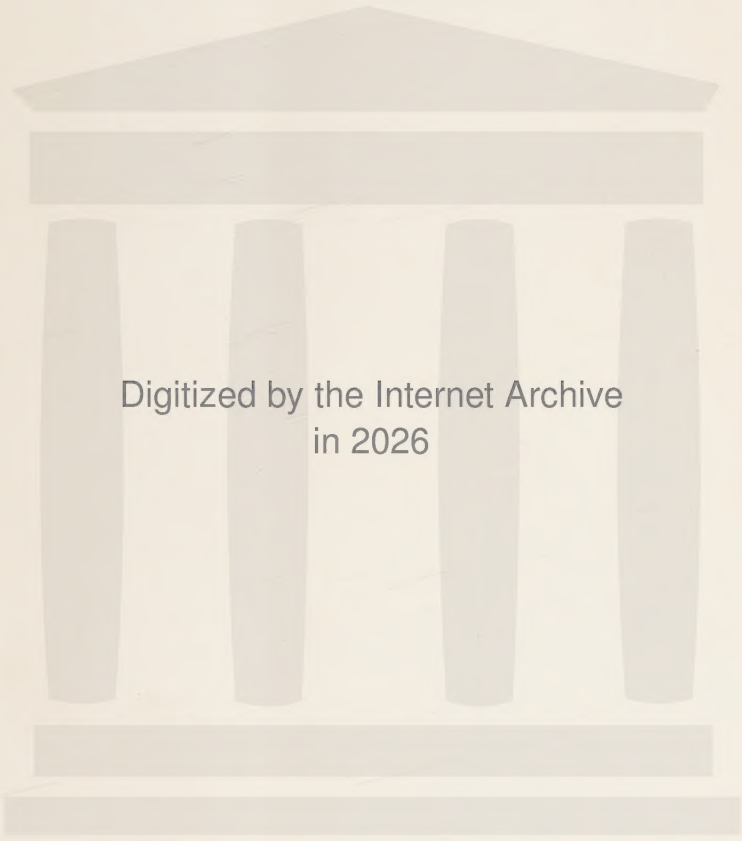
Volume III

Restoration, Abdication and Last Years:
1914-1920

Professor Marder concludes his trilogy on one of the most colourful and dynamic, and certainly most controversial, of Admirals in the long annals of the Royal Navy, with a volume which carries the story from the outbreak of World War I in 1914 to Fisher's death in 1920.

After the interregnum of 1910-1914, Fisher was restored to power as First Sea Lord in October 1914. Mounting differences with Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, led to the resignation of both Titans in May 1915. Fisher was never again prominent in the war councils of the nation, but through his friendships with the most influential naval officers and politicians he knew what was going on. His letters, as full of invective, high spirits and imaginative flights as ever, accordingly reveal many aspects of the inner history of the war, particularly at sea. Of special interest and importance is the material bearing on Jellicoe and Churchill.

As in the previous volumes, this delightful correspondence, thanks to Professor Marder's skill in arrangement and annotation, perfectly mirrors Fisher's extraordinary personality, and its revelations of behind-the-scenes activities give it an importance which will not be underrated by historians.



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FEAR GOD AND DREAD NOUGHT

VOLUME III

RESTORATION, ABDICATION, AND
LAST YEARS

1914-1920

By the same author

PORTRAIT OF AN ADMIRAL:
THE LIFE AND PAPERS OF SIR HERBERT RICHMOND

THE ANATOMY OF BRITISH SEA POWER:
A HISTORY OF BRITISH NAVAL POLICY IN THE PRE-
DREADNOUGHT ERA, 1880-1905

FEAR GOD AND DREAD NOUGHT:

VOLUME I
THE MAKING OF AN ADMIRAL
1854-1904

VOLUME II
YEARS OF POWER
1904-1914



BUST BY EPSTEIN, 1916

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FEAR GOD AND DREAD NOUGHT

The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet
LORD FISHER OF KILVERSTONE

Selected and Edited by
ARTHUR J. MARDER
University of Hawaii

VOLUME III
RESTORATION, ABDICATION, AND
LAST YEARS, 1914-1920



JONATHAN CAPE
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE
LONDON

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PREFACE

THIS is the last volume of a trilogy on the remarkable 'Jacky' Fisher. It was Dr. Johnson who said: 'In a Man's Letters . . . his soul lies naked, his letters are only the mirror of his breast . . .' How true this was of Fisher! His correspondence reveals his innermost thoughts and at the same time tells us much about his restoration to power, his decline and eclipse — a tragic story — and of much that went on behind the scenes in British foreign policy and naval policy. Throughout we have vivid glimpses of his extraordinary personality and genius. 'A strange, strange, wonderful person', in J. L. Garvin's words.

To the acknowledgements of the loan of letters made in previous volumes it is a pleasant duty to add these names: the fourteenth Duke of Hamilton, the first Baron Beaverbrook, Sir Gervais Tennyson-d'Eyncourt, second Baronet, Mr. John Bowle, Mr. Ralph Hodder-Williams and Lady Hodder-Williams, and Sir John Lang, Secretary of the Admiralty. Thanks to the courtesy of the sixth Earl of Rosebery, the late Admiral Sir Frederic Dreyer, the third Earl of Balfour, Dr. G. M. Trevelyan, Mr. Laurence P. Scott, the first Baron Hankey, Lady Hudson, Miss Viola G. Garvin, and the literary executors of the late Henry Wickham Steed and the proprietors of *The Times*, I was permitted to use letters written to the Admiral. I should like to repeat my expressions of gratitude to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Librarian of the Royal Archives, Sir Owen Morshead, this time for allowing me to use some of the Admiral's letters to and from King George V and Queen Alexandra; and to Sir Winston Churchill and his literary executors for a number of letters to and from him.

I am also indebted to the following: Air Commodore E. A. Masterman, R.A.F. (ret.), who supplied information on Fisher's work as First Sea Lord; Captain A. C. Dewar, R.N. (ret.), for material on Fisher-Churchill relations at the Admiralty; Dr. Charles Seymour, for the use of unpublished material from Colonel House's papers; Messrs. A. Victor Hull, of the British Museum Newspaper Library, J. P. J. Bartlam, of the Admiralty Library, Everett T. Moore, of the University of California at Los Angeles Library, and Dr. Harley Zeigler, of the University of Hawaii, who helped in the solution of a large number of sticky points. Of assistance in various ways were the

PREFACE

third Lord Fisher, the Misses Mary E. Wynne, M. B. Johnston, and Joyce Wright, Rear-Admiral Sir Murray Sueter, R.N. (ret.), Air-Marshal Sir Victor Goddard, R.A.F. (ret.), the tenth Earl of Selkirk, and Messrs. Anthony F. Moir, R. A. Wilson, J. R. Hickish, H. R. Aldridge, R. C. Mackworth-Young, and Richard Julian Corbett. Official correspondence (British Crown copyright reserved) has been reproduced, as before, with the kind permission of the Controller of Her Britannic Majesty's Stationery Office.

Deserving a paragraph all to themselves are a certain feminine member of our household, Jan by name, with a heavenly disposition that makes dedication to scholarship almost a pleasure; Messrs. G. Wren Howard and Michael Howard, of Jonathan Cape Limited, whose patience and thoughtfulness, far above and beyond the call of duty, spared me many a mental breakdown; the American Philosophical Society, whose sizeable grant from the Penrose Fund made possible a period of research in England; and the University of Hawaii, more particularly the late President Paul S. Bachman, President-Emeritus Gregg M. Sinclair, Dean Robert W. Hiatt, and Dr. Leonard D. Tuthill, for financial support, teaching-load reduction, and secretarial assistance throughout the preparation of the trilogy. Above all I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Henry Allen Moe, Secretary-General of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and the Trustees of the Foundation, for their generous financial assistance in the publication of this volume.

I wish to thank the following publishers and individuals for their kind permission to quote from the copyrighted material indicated: the third Viscount Esher, Messrs. Ivor Nicholson & Watson, A. P. Watt & Son, and Charles Scribner's Sons, from *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher*, edited by M. V. Brett and Oliver, Viscount Esher (American edition of Vols. III and IV under the title of *The Captains and the Kings Depart*); Odhams Press and Charles Scribner's Sons, from Sir Winston Churchill's *The World Crisis*, Vols. I and II (copyright 1923 by Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951 by Winston S. Churchill); Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., from Lord Fisher's *Memories and Records*, and, with Lady Bacon, A. P. Watt & Son and Doubleday & Co., from Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon's *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*; Hodder & Stoughton Ltd. and A. P. Watt & Son, from Rear-Admiral W. S. Chalmers's *The Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty*; The Hogarth Press Ltd., from Cecil Aspinall-Oglander's *Roger Keyes*; Sir Harold Nicolson and Constable

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& Co. Ltd., from Harold Nicolson's *King George the Fifth*; the Macmillan Company and G. Bell & Sons Ltd., from Sir J. J. Thomson's *Recollections and Reflections*; E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., and Hulton Press Ltd., from *Epstein: An Autobiography*; Cassell & Company Ltd., from Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon's *The Life of John Rushworth, Earl Jellicoe*; The Times Publishing Company, Limited, from *The Times* (Lord Fisher's letters); Chatto & Windus Ltd., from Walter Roch's *Mr. Lloyd George and the War*; Esther Hallam Meynell and Chapman & Hall Ltd., from Esther Meynell's *A Woman Talking*.

A final accounting shows that the more important Fisher letters I have not been able to consult include a few to Lord Cawdor, Lord Hankey, and Admiral Jellicoe, and an appreciable number to Winston Churchill and J. L. Garvin. The Garvin letters will form the backbone of a chapter in the projected official history of the *Observer*, and will illustrate the intimate ties between the Admiral and the world of journalism. The fifteen or so Jellicoe letters that I have not seen are with the reserved section of the Jellicoe Papers at the British Museum, under seal until 1966.

Finally, it is with deep regret that I find it impossible to repeat the proud assurance made in Volumes I and II that there have been no 'judicious omissions'. I have deemed it best to withhold a few passages and letters which are of considerable interest but whose publication at this time would not be advisable.

ARTHUR J. MARDER

Honolulu, Hawaii
Trafalgar Day, 1958

NOTE

This is as good a place as any to make a few minor corrections in Volumes I and II.

The missing word in I, 180, line 10, is 'cummin', whose seeds were used as a spice and as a medicine. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for going to such lengths in obeying the letter of the law as to 'pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin', while neglecting 'the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith' (Matthew, xxiii, 23).

In II, 55, 'Mazagan' should be spelled 'Mazighan'.

Letter No. 19 (II, 58), dated 'ca. April 26th, 1905', should be dated April 22nd.

The reference in II, 56, n. 1, is incorrect. Lansdowne was concerned with the question of the Moroccan ports. He had written Fisher (April 24th, 1905): 'I quite agree with you in thinking that we must keep an eye on those Moorish Ports, and the Prime Minister has, I am happy to say, allowed me to send a telegram to Paris which will make it clear that they had better confer with us, if the question is raised, and that we should join with them in opposing such a demand. This is as much as we can do at this stage, in spite of your tempting offer to bag the German Fleet, the Kiel Canal and Schleswig-Holstein in time for me to announce it when the H. of L. meets again.'

'Lochie', in the index to Volume II, should read 'Lochee'.

PROLOGUE

THE PRE-WAR YEARS, 1903-1914

SINCE the publication of the first two volumes of the Fisher trilogy, a few dozen letters that properly belonged in them have come to my attention. From these I have made a selection to supplement the material in the earlier volumes. The subject matter ranges from the Admiral's work on the Esher Committee of 1903-1904, concerned with War Office reorganization (the second Viscount Esher and Sir George Clarke, afterwards first Baron Sydenham, were the other members), to his concern with economy in naval administration, the invasion problem, and the German naval rivalry; his absolute faith in submarines and his lack of faith in the generals.

In this period Fisher was Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, August 31st, 1903, to October 19th, 1904; First Sea Lord, October 21st, 1904, to January 25th, 1910; then naval elder statesman until the beginning of the fourth month of World War I.

I: TO H. O. ARNOLD-FORSTER¹

Admiralty House
Portsmouth
October 17th, 1903

Private

My dear Arnold-Forster,

I've just had a most urgent letter from Prince Louis² entreating me not to serve on proposed Committee, as he says it will cause endless ill-feeling and bitterness amongst the soldiers! And Drury, May,³ and others write to the same effect! I am very loth to desert you in your need, but it is pointed out to me that the well-known fact that we two were always in such cordial agreement at the

¹ Arnold-Forster, Secretary of State for War, 1903-1905, previously Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty (1900-1903).

² Captain Prince Louis of Battenberg (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet the first Marquess of Milford Haven), Director of Naval Intelligence, 1903-1905.

³ Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Charles C. Drury, Second Sea Lord, 1903-1907; Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet) Sir William May, Third Sea Lord and Controller, 1901-1905.

PROLOGUE

Admiralty is really an objection, as we two should be again working together, not caring twopence for anyone else! Battenberg goes on to say what an immense lot there is still to do for the Navy, and all the changes in full swing at Portsmouth from which I should not be absent for a moment.

This is all quite true, so I really think you had better pitch me overboard, as I may be a Jonah to you, and some friendly whale will look after me all right! Therefore kindly write to Mr. Balfour to this effect.

Sir George Clarke is the one man you must have on your Committee at any cost. The more I consider the matter the more am I convinced that he is indispensable, *absolutely indispensable both* for the Committee stage and *afterwards* as a permanent official. He can be home in 5 weeks and *is eager to come*. . . .¹

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

2: TO JOHN S. SANDARS²

Admiralty, Whitehall
October 26th, 1903

Private

Dear Mr. Sandars,

The Adjutant-General³ suddenly arrived here this afternoon, having come straight away from the King without food to say His Majesty wished to see me to-morrow and that His Majesty was 'sick of fighting'. *So am I!* The Adjutant-General wants a compromise

¹ Arnold-Forster's reply of October 18th stressed that (1) no one outside the Admiralty was aware of their close collaboration there, and 'no idea of a "confederacy" between yourself and me will even enter anybody's head'; (2) Prince Louis was taking 'the narrow view and not the broad one'; (3) 'To my mind this seems a clear call of duty. . . . To endeavour to follow the example of the Board of Admiralty without having a member of that Board as an exponent of its practice would be an absurd proceeding'; (4) the work of the Committee could be so arranged as to interfere little with Fisher's job at Portsmouth; (5) the proposal for the Committee came from the King and the Prime Minister. It was an effective letter. As Fisher wrote him on October 18th: 'In the words of King Agrippa to the eloquent St. Paul (*that's you!*), "Almost thou persuadest me to be an Arnold-Forsterite!" I think I will leave it to the First Lord to decide and shall use your powerful arguments in writing to him to-night.' See further, *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 288-90.

² Sandars, principal private secretary to the Conservative Prime Minister of 1902-1905, Arthur J. (afterwards first Earl of) Balfour.

³ Lieutenant-General (afterwards General) Sir Thomas Kelly-Kenny, Adjutant-General, 1901-1904. See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 363, n. 26.

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and to have Brackenbury on as well as Grenfell.¹ I replied *three* is too many, let alone *four*. The best Committee is *one*, and I believe Lord Esher would make a good job of it alone! However, it's no use saying that.

I've asked Lord Knollys to kindly ask Lord Esher to see me on arrival. I don't want to be impracticable, but I am convinced the British Public will yell at Brackenbury and say, 'Why, this is one of those War Office chaps that ought to be hanging on a lamp post!' Also everyone tells me that Brackenbury is a most difficult and unpleasant colleague! Old Kelly-Kenny says he has sound views! This means, I suppose, that he will represent the Adjutant-General!

However, as I said before, I don't wish to be impracticable, but I desire success and the confidence of the Public in the Committee. The Adjutant-General says we ought not to care a damn for public opinion! I forgot to tell him Charley Beresford's story of the force of public opinion. He said, 'This is a free country, where everyone can do just what he likes, and if he doesn't, he's made to'!

I shall hope to come and see you when I have been boiled down at Buckingham Palace!

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

I've not heard a word from Lord Selborne.

3: TO JOHN S. SANDARS

Admiralty House
Portsmouth
November 4th, 1903

Private

Dear Mr. Sandars,

... *I consider it vital to stick to three*, and as for George Clarke he is of course the one man beyond all others for the work. He was the soul of the Hartington Royal Commission,² and Sir Clinton Dawkins spoke to me of him in the strongest terms in relation to the work of

¹ General Sir Henry Brackenbury, Director-General of Ordnance, 1899-1904; Lieutenant-General (afterwards Field-Marshal) the first Baron Grenfell, commanding the 4th Army Corps, 1903-1904. See *ibid.*, I, 364, n. 35.

² This Commission had examined the problem of interservice co-operation in 1890. Its report had eventually led to the establishment of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1903.

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his excellent committee which presented the most lucid report I have ever read. . . .¹

But what about the Generals? I hear the wire-pulling has been phenomenal! They've been buzzing round me like a hive of bees! Mind you've given the Prime Minister's word that my wife and family shall be provided for if anything happens to me! . . .

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

4: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Admiralty House
Portsmouth

[mid-November 1903?]

I have tried hard to see if I could refute any one of the arguments or statements in this paper,² but I can't! The only criticism I venture to offer is that hardly sufficient emphasis is laid on the fact of *the more than geometrical progression* with which difficulties increase with numbers in dealing with embarkations of troops and their impedimenta. 10,000 men are a fleabite! but 20,000 men means the gathering almost of a fleet of transports. It is conceivable that the former number could be embarked in a few hours in the men-of-war of the Fleet (they would be packed like herrings!), but the 20,000 men would require an organized transport, and this collecting and preparation of merchant vessels involves a series of delays which don't arise at all in the embarkation of the smaller number of troops in the men-of-war. A raid on the sea coast is all that is *suddenly* possible with a Fleet or Squadron backing up the landing force and ready to re-embark it, but a 'serious invasion' (as defined in this paper) is absolutely now beyond the conception of pessimists, however extreme, because, as stated (though hardly in forcible enough terms) in this paper, the development of the submarine boat has absolutely precluded the idea of a mass of transports approaching any position where the landing of troops is feasible. Only those who have seen a flotilla of submarine boats (as at Portsmouth) working out in the open sea can form the right conception of the revolution they have caused.

¹ Dawkins had been Chairman of the Committee on War Office Reorganization, 1901.

² Balfour's memorandum, dated November 11th, 1903, set forth the conclusions of the Cabinet's Defence Committee on the problem of invasion. See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 367, n. 69.

PROLOGUE

5: TO JOHN S. SANDARS

Admiralty House
Portsmouth
[mid-November 1903?]

Dear Sandars,

. . . Yes, I thought the Prime Minister's paper on Invasion *simply splendid*, and it further fortifies me in the opinion I have consistently held of the inestimable benefit of a civilian (as opposed to a technical or expert) being ever at the head of anything. The subjects treated of always get looked at by a civilian from an outside point of view and you get an unbiased summing-up.

In great haste, Ever yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

No sane sailor will ever attack a fort! I will send you what Lord Nelson said about that! But of course there always will be cases such as Copenhagen [1801] and Alexandria [1882], whose political considerations over-rode fighting disadvantages. . . .

6: TO JOHN S. SANDARS

Admiralty House
Portsmouth
December 29th, 1903

Private

My dear Sandars,

I enclose a very *secret* print for your edification on 'Invasion and Submarines' . . . I got out the Invasion Print for our War Office Committee to show the futility of invasion and of the six Army Corps and the mismanagement of Woolwich Arsenal.¹ Sir Evan MacGregor (Secretary of the Admiralty), a devoted friend of mine, was staying here when I wrote it, and he was simply aghast at the

¹ 'I have read with the deepest interest your "private and secret" notes on "Submarines"', Balfour wrote the Admiral, January 3rd, 1904. 'Some of the things you recommend have, I think, been already practically agreed upon by the Defence Committee and the Cabinet: e.g., the substitution of Submarines for Mines, and the defence of places, like Malta, Gibraltar, and Bermuda, by Submarines. It is unnecessary to tell you how heartily I am in sympathy with your observations on the relation between Submarines and Invasion; indeed, my Paper on Home Defence, which I think was shown you, is largely based upon the considerations to which you refer. . . .'

PROLOGUE

thoughts of Lord Selborne or my late colleagues hearing of it! Well! it's all quite true. '*Magna est veritas et prevalebit*'! but I quite see the wisdom of not kicking the shins of the Admiralty, so I am working subterraneously and with much effect to get matters right. My métier is that of the mole! You know of me by 'upheavals'. I believe some one said the other day, 'Whenever you see the Admirals rising, depend upon it, it's that d—d fellow, Jack Fisher, who is taking a rise out of them'! . . .

Esher and Clarke arrive here to-night to stay. We ought to present our report to the Prime Minister at 4 p.m. on Saturday, January 30.

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

. . . I've had several visits and communications from highly placed Military Mandarins on the Nicodemus line, which has been most instructive! As I said to Esher, 'How these Christians love one another!'

7: TO JOHN S. SANDARS

Admiralty House
Portsmouth
January 5th, 1904

Private

My dear Sandars,

. . .

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

You are splendid to back us up in this War Office reform. I have given my whole mind to it and I assure you that it is a matter of vital importance that our two proposals

- I. Formation of Defence Committee Department
- II. Formation of new Army Council

should be absolutely adopted by the Government and *put in force* BEFORE PARLIAMENT MEETS. It will redound immensely to the Prime Minister's credit, and, further, if he could confidentially see the Leaders of the Opposition and say, 'Now look here! This is not

PROLOGUE

a party matter, we have nothing whatever to do with it, it comes straight from this "Committee of Three", untouched and untampered! Join with us in its cordial acceptance' (*and they will*). But wait till Parliament meets and Kelly-Kenny and others will get their 80 or more military mercenaries in the House so to haggle at it that for peace and quietness (and to get it through) something will be altered or given up that will spoil it. Also, how are we possibly to effect these much needed reforms with unwilling instruments, or rather *hostile* instruments?

Say to Arnold-Forster, 'By adopting this line, you won't get personally attacked (as otherwise you would be), because you are jolly well hated in the House!' Say to the King, 'If you don't swallow this whole, the job may stand over to be settled by Edmund Robertson, M.P.,¹ and others of his kidney, and they want Cromwell's Army (a deuced good Army it was!), and no d—d aristocrat. Where will the Duke of Connaught² be then? and how will you like Labouchere³ as Adjutant-General?'

8: TO JOHN S. SANDARS

Admiralty House
Portsmouth
January 10th, 1904

Private

Dear Sandars,

... We meet to-morrow at the War Office to give the final touches to our two preliminary reports, and I feel absolutely confident that if the Prime Minister adopts them and publishes them before Parliament meets, and not care a d—n what his colleagues or anyone else thinks, he will have the whole Country with him, more especially were it to leak out that he did it off his own bat! Not that I mean to ignore the King, for His Majesty has, I think, been splendid all through and behaved like Queen Elizabeth, who always knew when to agree! and like the lady in 'Don Juan'

'Swearing she would n'er consent,
— consented.'

¹ Edmund Robertson (afterwards first Baron Lochee), onetime Civil Lord of the Admiralty (1892-1895), a member of the Radical, 'little-navy' wing of the Liberal Party.

² Field-Marshal the Duke of Connaught, King Edward's brother, Commander-in-Chief, Ireland, 1900-1904.

³ Henry Labouchere, journalist and Radical M.P., 1866-1906.

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What I so fear is procrastination, and once Parliament meets, then adieu to any decisive action, and as my splendid little friend (he is an Ar'er!) A. H. Lee, M.P.,¹ says, in come the 80 Military Mercenaries of Kelly-Kenny and his associated Military Mandarins and the unholy alliance of Tommy Bowles, Winston Churchill,² and other notoriety hunters.

We don't of course deserve it, but somehow or other our Committee has 'caught on' (as they say), and a virulent opponent of the Prime Minister considers our appointment a Machiavellian stroke of his, as all hands will accept our conclusions without question. What a pity if the Prime Minister throws away the fruit of his labours (as I'm sure he had bother enough getting us together!) by any pandering to anyone's susceptibilities or objections.

Put Lord Roberts³ on the Committee of Defence. What more exalted position for a man to hold! Give old Kelly-Kenny an Army Corps, and then he can go shooting with the King every day without any inconvenience to the Service (Evelyn Wood tells me he hunts 4 days in the week! He is the Commander of the Second Army Corps, I believe!) What a world we live in! I'm only a used-up Port Admiral, but I have to work like a nigger all day and every day (otherwise the niggers under me wouldn't work!).

I am terrified at putting (6) at the top of this page, so 'good-bye'.

Yours very truly,

J. A. Fisher

I had a letter yesterday from an M.P. of consequence calling Esher, Clarke, and myself the 'Magi'. I told him in reply we had a jolly good big star to lead us in the War Commission evidence!⁴ Have you ever gone through those 4 big volumes? What an *appalling* record of effete administration and military rottenness from top to bottom! It was a brave act to publish it. Nothing else would have raised the Country, and if you note the provincial press, you will see the feeling is still increasing.

¹ Arthur H. Lee (afterwards first Viscount Lee of Fareham), Civil Lord of the Admiralty, 1903-1905, later First Lord of the Admiralty, 1921-1922.

² T. Gibson Bowles, Conservative M.P., 1892-1906, an expert on international and maritime law; Winston (afterwards Sir Winston) S. Churchill, Conservative M.P. since 1900. Churchill joined the Liberal Party on May 31st, 1904.

³ Field-Marshal the first Earl Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, 1901-1904.

⁴ A Royal Commission had, in 1902-1903, inquired into the military preparations for and the conduct of the South African War.

PROLOGUE

9: TO JOHN S. SANDARS

Admiralty House
Portsmouth
January 20th, 1904

Private

Dear Sandars,

... [I] warmly thank you for your splendid 'backing-up'. It won't be my fault if you don't have an important niche in the Temple of Fame! I suppose there is no question that the 3 sections of our Report with the prefatory letter to the Prime Minister will be published *in extenso*. It would be a great tactical mistake not to do so. It would be at once said the Government were cooking our report, etc., etc., etc. to suit their own purposes! Also, I know you fully realize the supreme importance of getting it all out before Parliament meets... Another important point which I hear you also realize is to get the new Patent out and the names of the four new Military Members. I think Esher, Clarke, and myself are absolutely unanimous in recommending as follows:—

Lyttelton	—1st Military Member Operations and Strategy
Bruce-Hamilton	—2nd Military Member Personnel
Douglas	—3rd Military Member Supply and Transport
Wolfe Murray	—4th Military Member Armaments ¹

... I have no doubt with your usual sagacity and foresight you will give a judicious start to the press just prior to publication. . . .

Ever yours,

J. A. Fisher

¹ Lieutenant-General (afterwards General) Sir Neville Lyttelton, commanding the forces in South Africa, 1902-1904; Major-General (afterwards General) Sir Bruce Hamilton, commanding the 2nd Division and 3rd Brigade, 1st Army Corps, 1903-1904; Major-General (afterwards General Sir) Charles W. H. Douglas, commanding the 2nd Division of the 1st Army Corps, 1902-1904; Major-General (afterwards Lieutenant-General) Sir James Wolfe Murray, Quartermaster-General in India, 1903-1904. Compare these recommendations with the totally different recommendations in Fisher's letter to Esher, which, unfortunately, is not dated: *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 295-6. It would seem, however, that the Esher letter predates the letter to Sandars. The upshot: Lyttelton did become Chief of the General Staff and First Military Member of the Army Council; Douglas became Adjutant-General and *Second* Military Member of the Army Council (as Fisher urged in a January 23rd letter to Sandars); Major-General Herbert C. O. (afterwards Field-Marshal the first Viscount) Plumer became Quartermaster-General and Third Military Member, and Murray, Master-General of the Ordnance and Fourth Military Member.

PROLOGUE

There appears to be no difficulty in providing for the 'old gang'!

The Golden Bridge

Kelly-Kenny — 4th Army Corps *vice* Grenfell

Grenfell — Ireland *vice* Duke of Connaught.

Duke of Connaught — Inspector-General. New office, but give Lord Roberts six months of it first.

Ian Hamilton — 2nd Army Corps *vice* Evelyn Wood, when time up shortly.

Nicholson — Governor of Gibraltar *vice* Sir G. White shortly.

Brackenbury — Time up and bad health.

Then either Kelly-Kenny or Ian Hamilton are available also to succeed Lyttelton at the Cape, if Lyttelton is chosen as 1st Military Member.¹

IO: TO JOHN S. SANDARS

Admiralty House

Portsmouth

January 23rd, 1904

Private

Dear Sandars,

... If Nicholson remains as 1st Military Member, then I certainly would ask not to serve any longer on the Committee, and, further, I would not accept the post of 1st Sea Lord next September, were it to be offered me. However, this is only for your private information, as it is not for me to put myself forward as a better man than Nicholson. There must be a clean sweep of the 'old gang' out of the War Office! '*New measures, new men.*' Ask Prince Louis of Battenberg to come and see you, and he will explain how utterly hopeless it is to co-operate with Nicholson. Prince Louis has been staying with me some days, and I have gone closely into this matter with him, and quite made up my mind that the Admiralty must make Nicholson a *casus belli*, and if they don't, *then I must!*² Bruce-Hamilton is an 'apostle

¹ Again, these 'golden bridge' recommendations should be compared with those in the letter to Esher: *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 297. The recommendations went through, excepting those for Kelly-Kenny, who received no appointment, and Lieutenant-General Sir William (afterwards Field Marshal the first Baron) Nicholson, Director-General of Mobilization and Military Intelligence, 1901-1904, who went to Manchuria in March as Chief British Military Attaché with the Japanese Army. Roberts joined the Committee of Imperial Defence, as recommended in the Esher letter.

² But Nicholson became Chief of the Imperial General Staff and First Military Member of the Army Council in 1908 (-1912).

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of efficiency' . . . that is why it is supremely important to have him.

. . .

Ever yours in haste and infinitely obliged,

J. A. Fisher

To tell you the honest and private truth, I am not over-keen to remain serving either here or at the Admiralty, as I have something outside open to me 'beyond the dreams of avarice'! *but this is quite between ourselves.*

II: TO JOHN S. SANDARS¹

48, Grosvenor Square, W.
4 a.m.! Friday
[July 29th, 1904]

Sleepless till I have prayed you to go on your bended knees to your dear master and entreated him to do 3 things!

I. *Instantly publish his great paper on Invasion* and say the Aldershot Force all that is wanted, *so reduce Home Army.*

II. *Get rid of Indian Bogy!* It is admitted no reinforcements would be wanted for months. We shan't want to send anything like the numbers sent to South Africa. South Africa shows we can send them when the time comes! *without keeping 100,000 men eating their heads off to provide for an eventuality that may arise in about a hundred years time.* Do please look at the map of Afghanistan and don't let these Indian idiots fool the Prime Minister!

III. Let the Prime Minister issue an edict on the principle of the Medes and Persians (*which altereth not!*) and shove any one who objects into the lions' den! (Send him down to Portsmouth.) *That the regular Army is at once to be reduced by the 60,000-odd men it has been increased in the last 10 years! This means three pence off the income tax! if you take in the indirect savings!*

Gehazi! If you don't tell your Master these truths, you will be turned into a leper as white as snow! and we'll sweep the Country with the cry, 'Down with Balfour and his Bloated Army!' and 'D—n Sandars!'

¹ See *ibid.*, I, 320-1, which letter should be dated July 29th, 1904.

PROLOGUE

12: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR¹

Admiralty, Whitehall
5 a.m. [March 3rd, 1905]

Dear Mr. Balfour,

I'm a persistent bore, but you remember the story of Admiral Brown and Mr. Ward Hunt!² I've made the further enquiries³ and feel fortified as to incompatibility, so better not to marry than the inevitable divorce! Therefore, to free yourself of all embarrassment, why not let me seek the pecuniary 'pastures new' which are inviting me, and everyone will understand, because they know I am a pauper! You will find all will go well. Elisha came along all right when Elijah left in that abrupt manner! There are lots more where I came from and there will be a scramble for the mantle!

Don't trouble to reply. You shan't have any bother about me. *We all owe you too much.* I can glide out quite naturally.

Ever yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

I hope you will hang on like grim death till the autumn of 1906! Knock out 30 Irish Members and disfranchise all government employees! and next year we'll have the income tax at sixpence and the Army Estimates at 20 millions! *and a free cup of tea!* What a wicked tax it is!

13: TO SIR THOMAS SANDERSON⁴

Admiralty, Whitehall
July 25th, 1905

Dear Sir Thomas Sanderson,

There are two decisive reasons why any extract from Captain Pakenham's dispatch respecting the *Borodino* should not even privately be communicated to the Emperor of Russia.

¹ This is the complete original letter. *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 53, has an edited, incomplete version.

² George Ward Hunt, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1874-1877.

³ About Walter H. (afterwards first Viscount) Long, who Balfour wished to have succeed Selborne as First Lord of the Admiralty. Long, Conservative M.P., 1880-1921, did become First Lord - in 1919 (-1921).

⁴ Afterwards first Baron Sanderson; Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1894-1906. The British Ambassador at St. Petersburg had asked permission to give the Tsar an extract from the dispatch of the British Naval Attaché, Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) William C. Pakenham, on the gallant conduct of the Russian battleship *Borodino* in the Battle of Tsushima Straits (May 27th-28th, 1905).

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I. The Japanese Official account of the Battle has now been published. It would be outrageous on our part to supplement it in order to glorify the Russians. Is there nothing to be said *per contra* of the Japanese? The Japanese Prince told me of a Division of the Japanese Army 4,000 men strong and only three men not killed! This is not published, nor is it going to be.

II. Captain Pakenham with great judgment politely refused to give the Japanese Ministry of Marine any account of the Battle or to see his dispatch, for fear of in any way trenching on Admiral Togo's account of his own Battle.

Can't you imagine the Japanese resentment when the *Borodino* account is made public (as certainly it would be), and not one word in praise of Togo's *not* victory but *annihilation* of a far superior Fleet, though with admirable modesty and exquisite good taste Togo says officially, '*The Fleets were not unequal*', when he only had 4 battleships against the Russian 11!

I repeat, is no Japanese Heroism to be related?

Also remember, no Naval Attaché from any other Country was allowed with the Japanese Fleet, so it is not, as assumed in one of your enclosures, an ordinary case of an Attaché reporting on passing events, for, as David said, this would certainly be a case of 'mine own familiar friend whom I trusted' playing false!

I venture to go further and express the regret that our Minister in Japan should have sent extracts of Captain Pakenham's dispatch elsewhere. If ever a dispatch should be kept *profoundly* secret, it is this one of Captain Pakenham's, as there are great lessons of vital value to be drawn from it. Possibly even the Japanese themselves don't see the whole force of the lesson!

I hope, therefore, your copy in the Foreign Office will be burnt — ours is locked up in a safe!

The deductions and the lessons will go to our Officers in the form of Manœuvres carefully disguised to obscure the real points from the world at large and other Navies in particular.

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

PROLOGUE

14: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Savoy Westend Hotel
Carlsbad
September 12th [1905]

Dear Mr. Balfour,

I'm in the 7th Heaven and so will you be when you have read this letter! Jameson, the Cape Prime Minister, has been staying at this hotel, and also Beit (the possessor of a hundred millions sterling), who seems his ruling spirit! He was Cecil Rhodes's great friend and partner.¹ I gave them a few words on three consecutive days, and Jameson (*cum* Beit) engages to get £300,000 a year out of the South African Colonies to build and equip and maintain submarine boats at the 5 principal South African ports. He will commence with 5 next year and then build 5 a year annually, the Admiralty to provide the officers and crews of the first 5 boats, and then they will train the local volunteers (of whom Jameson says they have plenty of the exact right type for this service — brightly educated men, engineers, and artisans, etc.). *Jameson wants to keep it all a dead secret*, as he will have to square the Opposition and get hold of the other Governments. I have given him full details and guaranteed to do all the work myself in England as to ordering the boats and looking after them, etc. Jameson and Beit see plainly that if they start this scheme, Australia, Canada, etc., etc. will all follow suit. They (*all other Colonies*) will see from the proceedings in the South African Parliament all the enormous advantages of submarine boats both for defence and offence, and give up the *insane, silly* idea of Colonies having battleships and armoured cruisers of their own! You yourself gave the most convincing reasons to Austen² against it, so I need not repeat them! NO LOCAL NAVY CAN EVER BE EFFICIENT! Jameson and Beit see the great offensive power of the submarine, owing to the facility with which they can be towed to any distance at high speed (18 knots). Telegram (1907)!!! Admiralty to Jameson: 'Lay embargo on ten fast mail steamers (Donald Currie Line preferred). Order them to tow 10 submarine boats at 18 knots speed to Dardanelles via East Coast of Africa and Red Sea, as German Emperor, taking advantage of his offensive and defensive alliance with Turkey,

¹ Starr Jameson (afterwards first Baronet), who had led the famous raid on the Transvaal in December 1895, was Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, 1904-1908; Alfred Beit, a prominent South African business man; Cecil Rhodes, the British financier and empire-builder in South Africa.

² Austen (afterwards Sir Austen) Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1903-1906.

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is marching his army on Egypt via Turkey and Persia by his German railway through Asia Minor.' *Jameson and Beit greatly enthused over that telegram!* (It was a late hour in the night when we got to this telegram!) . . .

Isn't it curious? Yesterday I got a very influentially signed proposal asking me to support Canada building a battleship for local Navy. I'm going to reply: '*Collect the million sterling that you feel sure of getting and then we'll tell you how to spend it!*' . . .

I don't want to be egotistical, but that blatant, boastful ass Beresford¹ has been writing the most utter bosh I ever read in my life. The outcome is that the Sea Lords of the Admiralty are imbeciles and Beresford is the *one and only man* who knows anything! and yet it's patent even to the '*wayfaring man and the stranger*' (as Isaiah says) that all we have been doing for the Navy has at least *trebled* its power, some foreigners even say '*quintupled it*' . . .

Ever yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

15: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR WILLIAM MAY²

Grand Hotel Neues Kurhaus
Levico [South Tyrol]
October 5th, 1905

Dear May,

The orders have been given for you to come home at Christmas. Please rub it in to your Fleet that it is no precedent.

¹ Acting Admiral Lord Charles (afterwards Admiral the first Baron) Beresford, Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, 1905-1907. The feud between Fisher and Beresford (1906 ff.) was germinating at this time.

² May was Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, 1905-1907. The Committee of Imperial Defence had, on July 26th, asked the Admiralty to consider the practicability of taking over from the War Office 'the charge of the fixed defences of Gibraltar'. The Admiralty at first was interested, and the First Lord, Lord Cawdor, informed the C.I.D. on August 9th that there were 'strong *prima facie* grounds in favour of the proposed transfer of the Rock of Gibraltar from military to naval control'. He mentioned the apparent impossibility of otherwise providing for the needs of the Atlantic Fleet, the military authorities being unable to give it the further space facilities on shore that were very necessary. But early in 1906, after making an exhaustive examination of the proposal, the Admiralty withdrew their offer. Among the reasons given: (1) to provide a naval garrison for Gibraltar it would be necessary to add several thousand men to the strength of the Navy, and to give them specialist training they could not use on board ship; (2) great difficulties would arise as regards control of the civil population; (3) British interests were not likely to be directly menaced in the Mediterranean, in view of the 'solidarity of interests' with France, while 'the strategic storm centre' had shifted from the Mediterranean to the North Sea, 'to which the grouping of British naval strength must therefore be similarly moved'.

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Will you make a point of seeing me when you come home about the Navy taking over Gibraltar completely? *The Commander-in-Chief of Atlantic Fleet to be Governor!* with a Vice-Admiral as Deputy Governor permanently resident, *and the Colonial Office not having anything to do with it.* Four battleships' crews would be the garrison, to be changed every year with the ships of the Atlantic Fleet. Most of the civilian population to be cleared out to give more room.

Private. The Prime Minister is in favour of this scheme! . . . I make out that a garrison of 3,000 men (*all told*) would be amply sufficient. If Spain is *friendly*, then no one can attack Gibraltar! If Spain is *hostile*, then there are 14 miles of fire on Spanish ground round Gibraltar for heavy guns to play on Gibraltar, and *nothing could resist* that amount of fire with endless reserves of ammunition to be brought up by train! If France is in league with Spain, then the whole British Army would be insufficient to withstand a land attack. If Spain is *hostile*, then for us it would be splendid! and *the very thing we want!* Because we should *then* take *Ceuta* (more valuable really to us than Gibraltar, because of its position in Morocco, etc.) We should take the Balearic Islands (one of the strategic points of the world!) *and the Canaries!* and *perhaps* be able to hold on to Gibraltar as well! . . .

Nothing will ever induce me personally to agree to garrisoning Gibraltar entirely with Marines! or having a Marine General as Governor! The last end would be worse than the first! It must be purely a Naval Government! and solely under the Admiralty! The Marine Officer can't be loyal! Just look at the statue outside the Admiralty in honour of the Marines, recently put up by them! It has its back turned on the Admiralty, *and it's looking at the War Office!* The Marine Officers (not the Marines) are always hankering after the Army! *D—n the Army!* Another reason! If we had 3,000 Marines locked up at Gibraltar, we should want another 3,000 Marines at home as their relief, and then the *total* number of Marines would be so great they would cease to be Marines, as they would have no sea service hardly. Even at present only 30 per cent of their whole service is on board a ship, and most of that often in a harbour ship!

Please work out a plan and send it to me.

Yours till death,

J. F.

. . . N.B. *This letter is not a studied effusion, but it's all correct!*

PROLOGUE

16: TO SIR GEORGE CLARKE¹

Levico

October 12th, 1905

My dear Clarke,

Two things specially I want to write you about! *if not three!*

I. . . . I don't want to move until we have Sir W. May home to give evidence before Committee of Defence on the subject . . . Secondly, I want to move warily so as to be sure of getting rid of the incubus of the Colonial Office and so get absolute Admiralty jurisdiction at Gibraltar. There are really no civil rights at Gibraltar as exist at Malta. *It's a conquered place and a pure fortress!* . . .

II. I sent the Prime Minister for him to alter and put in his own language a short memorandum on the genesis and necessity of the sub-committee of the C.I.D. on Naval and Military co-operation in the elaboration of schemes for oversea expeditions.² I think (*indeed I feel sure*) you will agree with me that it is imperative to have something of this sort on record together with an authoritative statement thus emanating direct from the Prime Minister himself as to what the *modus operandi* shall be! . . . My chief point is that in the inevitable change of Government next year it is essential to have this sub-committee's functions established beyond alteration. I look on this sub-committee as the one and only engine that will silently draw the War Office out of its present quagmire '*of one man waiting for another*'. They are all of them each watching the other as to what each are after!³ Evelyn Wood once said to me, 'When shall we get your harmonious spirit of unity (so remarkable in the Navy) into the Army?' I replied, 'When the Army all wear the same uniform and only have cap and ribbons to tell one regiment from another, and the cursed system of regimental promotion is superseded by the Navy system of a general list!' *Lord! how his face did lengthen!!* BUT IT HAS TO COME! and I am glad to hear privately that Kitchener⁴ agrees!

The III heading I will reserve for another letter, as I must close

¹ Clarke was the first Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 1904-1907.

² This Admiralty print of October 1905, 'The Elaboration of Combined Naval and Military Preparations for War', was inspired by Balfour's decision to form a permanent Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence to deal with this all-important question. The Prime Minister, in introducing his proposals to the C.I.D., had explained that he was aware that schemes were already in existence at the Admiralty and War Office for joint naval and military expeditions, but that these were not sufficiently complete in detail for Cabinet reference.

³ On the same general theme, in a letter of October 10th to Sandars: 'You will see how silently it [the new Committee] will work a revolution in the War Office! They will be FORCED to get on, *forced* to co-operate, and, finally, *forced* to be efficient!'

⁴ General the first Viscount (afterwards Field-Marshal the first Earl) Kitchener, Commander-in-Chief, India, 1902-1909.

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this, but it's the most interesting and important. It refers to the secret understanding between Germany and Turkey, which I really believe is unknown to the Prime Minister and Lansdowne, who when they hear of it will think it a big joke. *But wait till I give you the particulars which I obtained!* (more after the manner of the *Arabian Nights* or *Mr. Isaacs* by Marion Crawford than anything I've ever read or heard of) — a folio of plans I saw with my own eyes! *but this is sacredly private.* Hardly anyone knows except the great Financier who told me what a life and death struggle is before Germany if Roosevelt succeeds in his great schemes in regard to South America and Mr. Chamberlain's Fiscal Policy is adopted.¹ The German Emperor knows that in these events Germany must fight or die.

Yours ever,

J. A. Fisher

17: TO VISCOUNT ESHER²

16, Queen Anne's Gate, S.W.
Sunday [February 18th? 1906]

My beloved Friend,

What does Clarke's letter which you send me resolve itself into? There are no naval plans for war because he doesn't know them! He has pumped Ottley³ and finds he doesn't know either! He can go on pumping all round with the same result! The French War Office haven't told the English War Office their plans — what fools if they did! to peril their military plans for the military drop in the ocean that our military support signifies! So also the English Admiralty intend to keep their own counsel! *But* as to our Navy not being ready! HOW SILLY! Why, on Friday last at half hour's notice *and in half an hour* every mortal vessel in reserve at Portsmouth was fully manned *and ready for immediate battle!* The other Ports are equally

¹ The 'South American policy' of Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, 1901-1909, revolved about the 'Roosevelt Corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine (1904), which asserted the interest of the United States in so guiding the economic affairs of the weak Latin American states as to remove opportunities for foreign intervention. In practice, this led to American economic penetration of Latin America. Joseph Chamberlain had, since his resignation from the Government in 1903, been sponsoring a programme of tariff preference for the Colonies as a means of closer political union of the Empire. His three-year campaign ended in July 1906, when he suffered a paralytic stroke.

² This is in reply to Esher's letter of February 18th, 1906, for which see Maurice V. Brett and Oliver, Viscount Esher (eds.): *Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher* (4 vols., London, 1934-1938), II, 145.

³ Captain (afterwards Rear-Admiral Sir) Charles L. Ottley, Director of Naval Intelligence, 1905-1907.

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ready with their reserve vessels. A fortnight ago we suddenly sent 147 torpedo craft to sea from the Reserve fully officered and manned, and they all steamed at their maximum power without a single hitch in a single vessel! The world hasn't seen anything like this before! *Clarke is a 'hass'!* What does he know as to what is between me and Wilson?¹ How CAN he know? We shall have to make him Governor of Kamchatka!

Yours till death,

J. F.

18: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Kilverstone Hall
October 15th, 1910

Secret

Dear Mr. Balfour,

A friend of mine through American influence (which you know is all-powerful with the German Emperor for excellent reasons) has in the last few days been all over Krupps works and Wilhelmshaven and Kiel and the private building yards, preceded by a letter from Admiral Tirpitz (the Minister of Marine) which the General Admiral at Wilhelmshaven showed my friend, saying, 'He is a prudent man — have no secrets from him', and my informant says that everywhere all seemed open to him. *This may have been very astute!* for my informant says that the net result of his inquisitorial examination was that retardation not acceleration is the present aspect of German shipbuilding. The German Dreadnoughts, for example, for 1910 not yet laid down. He walked over the vacant building slips which they are to occupy. He saw nothing larger than a 12-inch gun anywhere. Our magnificent new 13½-inch gun being put in our ships now building before they, the Germans, had any inkling of it has knocked them into a cocked hat! It is as superior to the 12-inch as the 12-inch to a pea-shooter! This retardation he saw (which they desire therefore to make the most of) may be due to re-designing involving great delay so as to have a 14-inch gun in the new ships. They would be d—d fools to build new ships with 12-inch guns, but then they have only just this moment got to the 12-inch gun! so of course it's a confounded nuisance for them to make two plunges almost at once!²

¹ Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet, third Baronet), Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet, 1905-1907.

² The first German dreadnoughts to mount guns of more than 12-inch calibre (eight 15-inch) were laid down in 1913-1914.

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He went over their new ships and not impressed — so cramped. For example, in the *Westfalen* there were 4 Lieutenants sleeping in one cabin! (We know from other sources they draw more water than intended.)

Anyhow, it is satisfactory to get this reassuring information, but, nevertheless, there should be no relaxation whatever on that account in our exertions to maintain the 'unassailable supremacy' that Mr. Asquith¹ vows, so I am hoping this information may not leak out. The British Public must feel worried! The great recommendation of the '2 keels to 1' standard is that it eliminates the United States. Very great people in the United States have told me recently this is very important. There is a big German-Irish organization in the United States fostering animosity towards us.

Our diplomacy is sad if not effete, and the German Ambassador at Constantinople² is the biggest man in the world. Round him revolves Peace or War, and we are the biggest Mahomedan nation, but Sir C. Hardinge and Nicolson,³ having been Ambassadors in Russia, can't see it, and a d—d fine mess they have both made of it! . . .

Yours truly,

J. A. Fisher

. . .

19: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Kilverstone Hall
October 23rd, 1910

Dear Mr. Balfour,

I should not write again but for telepathy! My absorbing thought for six years has been the one point you mention.⁴ To push young

¹ H. H. Asquith (afterwards first Earl of Oxford and Asquith), Liberal Prime Minister, 1908-1916.

² Baron Marschall von Bieberstein, German Ambassador at Constantinople, 1897-1912.

³ The first Baron Hardinge of Penshurst, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1906-1910, had been succeeded in June 1910 (-1916) by Sir Arthur Nicolson, eleventh Baronet (afterwards first Baron Carnock).

⁴ Balfour had found Fisher's letter of October 15th 'on the whole reassuring, but it would be very unpleasant to wake one morning and find that the Germans were well ahead of us in building ships for 14-inch guns! . . . once they get ahead with a particular design, it will not be easy to catch them up'. Then Balfour had mentioned a point which was giving him 'great anxiety': 'It seems to me almost inevitable that our changes of "matériel" will outrun the adaptive powers of our Naval tacticians. The ablest man who has spent his life in thinking in terms of 9-inch guns and torpedo destroyers will not easily adapt himself to 13- or 14-inch guns and submarines.'



H. Cusack
M.P.

John Herbert
M.P.

The Navy supported by the Parties!!

PROLOGUE

men to the high commands who will think in submarines and 13½-inch guns! Such a one — the first fruits of ceaseless importunity — goes as Commander-in-Chief of the Atlantic Fleet next month — Sir John Jellicoe. Phenomenally young and junior. He will be Nelson at Cape St. Vincent until he becomes 'Boss' at Trafalgar when Armageddon comes along in 1915 or thereabouts — not sooner!¹ Others follow in his footsteps. The 'fossils' hate submarines and the big gun! . . .

Yours truly,

Fisher

20: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Langham House
Ham Common
[May 1913?]

Dear Mr. Balfour,

In extension of our conversation, when I so much enjoyed lunching with you the other day, allow me to emphasize the following facts, though I know you are quite as convinced as I am that submarines and aviation govern the future!

There are two distinct types of submarines:

- I. Oceangoing
- II. Coastal

Both types are confessed to be in unchallenged control of the waters they infest — the Big Type, the enemy's coasts, the small, our own. No antidote has been yet found to submarines — a blockade is essential to prevent the enemy's commerce-destroyers and mine-laying vessels putting to sea. A Big Type submarine has greater sea-keeping qualities than any surface vessel — far in advance. No surface vessel can maintain a blockade without imminent danger of destruction. A submarine is immune. The most determined enemy will not send loaded transports across a sea infested by submarines from his own beach to the beach he yearns for! '*Omne ignotum pro magnifico [est]*'.² A submarine pops up its periscope off Cuxhaven and

¹ This appears to be the earliest reference in the Fisher correspondence to the Admiral's ambition to see his protégé, Rear-Admiral Sir John (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet the first Earl) Jellicoe, in command of the main fleet when war broke out. But see Letter No. 27.

² 'Everything which is unknown is taken for magnificent', from Tacitus's *Agricola*.

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the mouth of the Elbe and the Skaggerack. How many more are there, says the trembling German! *But we have not got enough submarines!* Lord Roberts's 8 to 12 millions required for his scheme [for a conscript army] should be applied to submarines.¹ Remember, the British Admiralty in the past objected to steamships and, as iron would not float, gave a Board order to go on building wooden ships! Read about the Italians going to Tripoli. . . .

Yours truly,

Fisher

21: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Zum Grünen Kreuz
Marienbad
September 8th, 1913

Dear Mr. Balfour,

. . . I've received excellent and reliable letters from my young submarine friends in the manoeuvres. They *swear* they bagged quite 40 per cent of the big ships — but the whole spirit of the 'big-wigs' is against them, and one gallant Red Admiral, though he had been blown up eleven times, pursued the even tenor of his raiding course and signalled to the submarines, '*You be d—d!*' . . .

Yours truly,

Fisher

22: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Langham House
July 31st, 1914

Private

Dear Mr. Balfour,

With our conversation of yesterday fresh in my mind as to Winston scrapping Admirals '*with a courageous stroke of the pen*'!² I want to mention to you that since being a Midshipman I have adored the

¹ 'Lord Roberts's Rabble wouldn't do as an Army in Flanders (*which his backers want!* for they know that invasion is twaddle!). He is their facile dupe! A conscript Army and an overseas Army would be unequally yoked together. Half of the millions in Zeppelins and submarines would be so infinitely more soothing to our old women of both sexes.' 'We are woefully behind! ZEPPELINS and SUBMARINES' (Fisher to Balfour, November 22nd, 29th, 1912, respectively).

² See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 424.



CHURCHILL AND FISHER AT THE ADMIRALTY, 1913

PROLOGUE

English principle of having *civilian* First Lords of the Admiralty, because I read how Lord Spencer, then First Lord, on his own initiative and against the Navy traditions sent Nelson to the Mediterranean over the head of Sir John Orde and others (who had their Flags flying), and *hence we got the Battle of the Nile!* the finest of all sea fights since the world began! . . . So now we get Jellicoe as Admiralissimo, and there will be a hell of a row amongst the Admirals!¹ (If there is, I've promised Winston to go on the stump!)

Yours truly,

Fisher

I know you won't breathe a word of all I said yesterday, but the *'completeness' of everything is lovely!* . . .

¹ The Admiralty had intimated to Jellicoe that day, July 31st, that he might shortly succeed Admiral Sir George Callaghan as Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet. On August 4th Jellicoe took over the command.

PART ONE

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION

1914-1915

CHAPTER I

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915¹

AND so the great war had come at last — the war which in 1910 Fisher had predicted would break out in the autumn of 1914. His terrific energy had at first little scope. The First Lord, Churchill, consulted him on strategic matters on a few occasions. For the rest the Admiral was recuperating from pleurisy and was busily engaged in securing naval commissions for his civilian friends,² and with plans for freeing his daughter and son-in-law, Beatrix and Rear-Admiral (ret.) Reginald Neeld, whom the Germans had interned at Mannheim. Prospects of playing a useful role in the prosecution of the naval war were so dim that on October 26th he wrote George Lambert, Civil Lord of the Admiralty, that he planned to leave for Naples on November 20th to join the Neelds, who had been deported there by the Germans. 'I don't see any use my being in England with the dead set at me by the King, and the Prime Minister "kow-towing" to him!' Four days later he had replaced Prince Louis of Battenberg as First Sea Lord. Shortly after the appointment, he prayed at Westminster Abbey and was heard to mutter as he left: '*Resurrected! Resurrected! Resurrected! Again!*'

Fisher returned to Whitehall as the saviour of Britain, the elect of the nation, to take over the management of the weapon he had forged for the safety of Britain and the Empire. Beatty, commanding the Battle Cruiser Squadron, probably reflected the feelings of the

¹ On Fisher's second tenure as First Sea Lord, through his resignation, see especially Arthur J. Marder: *Portrait of an Admiral: the Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond* (London, 1952), pp. 124-54, *passim*; Fisher: *Memories* (London, 1919), pp. 32-3, 50-90, 115-16, 118, 124-33, 135-7, 283, and *Records* (London, 1919), pp. 186-8, 227-30 (both volumes will be hereafter cited by title only); Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon: *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (2 vols., London, 1929), I, x-xv, II, 160-284; Winston S. Churchill: *The World Crisis* (4 vols. in 5, London, 1923-29), I, 401-6, 440-60, II, *passim* (hereafter cited by title only, and note also that the pagination of the American edition is different); *Dardanelles Commission. First Report* (Cd. 8490; 1917). Particularly valuable were the unpublished notes of Fisher's Naval Assistant, Captain T. E. Crease, on the May crisis, which Bacon was not permitted fully to utilize, and the exchange of correspondence between Crease and Churchill in 1923. The latter is printed as Appendix IV (pp. 553-8) in the second London edition of Volume II. As in the previous volumes, there is no attempt at completeness in the chapter introductions. The writer is preparing a large work on British sea power in the 'Fisher Era', 1904-1919.

² 'They gave me 5 commissions and I asked for 9 and got them! I fear I cannot possibly promise your two friends, but I am going to see Winston on Monday and will ask' (Fisher to Arnold White, October 3rd, 1914).

great majority of senior officers over the 'resurrection' of Fisher.

Well! I think he is the best they could have done, but I wish he was ten years younger. He still has fine zeal, energy, and determination, coupled with low cunning, which is eminently desirable just now. He also has courage and will take any responsibility. He will recognize that his position is absolutely secure and will rule the Admiralty and Winston with a heavy hand. He has patriotism, and is a firm believer in the good qualities of the Navy, that it can do anything and will go anywhere, and please God we shall change our present method for a strong offensive policy.¹

At once the old sea dog threw himself into the task of prosecuting the naval war with vigour.² 'I worked 22 hours out of 24 yesterday! But 2 hours sleep is not quite enough, so I shall slow down gradually!' (Fisher to Robert Donald, November 1st, 1914). Slow down he did, but it is remarkable how much energy he retained. Churchill has paid him this tribute:

Lord Fisher's age and the great strain to which he was now to be subjected made it necessary for him to lead a very careful life. He usually retired to rest shortly after 8 o'clock, awaking refreshed between four and five, or even earlier. In these morning hours he gave his greatest effort, transacting an immense quantity of business, writing innumerable letters and forming his resolutions for the day. . . . As the afternoon approached the formidable energy of the morning gradually declined, and with the shades of night the old Admiral's giant strength was often visibly exhausted. Still, judged from the point of view of physical and mental vigour alone, it was a wonderful effort, and one which filled me, who watched him so closely, with admiration and, I will add, reassurance.³

Typifying the spirit of the new régime was the 'RUSH' label in red, attached to urgent correspondence, and the card which he had printed:

¹ Beatty to Lady Beatty, November 2nd, 1914; Rear-Admiral W. C. Chalmers: *The Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty* (London, 1951), pp. 160-1.

² But not before he had arranged to replace the threadbare carpet in the First Sea Lord's room! 'This had not troubled Prince Louis, but Lord Fisher could "only think on a Turkey carpet", so a Turkey carpet had to be obtained' (Lady [Oswyn] Murray: *The Making of a Civil Servant* [London, 1940], p. 90).

³ *The World Crisis*, I, 404-5.

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BUSINESS

Call on a Business man in Business hours only on Business. Transact your Business and go about your Business, in order to give him time to finish his Business, and you time to mind your own Business.

'Everything began to move. Inertia disappeared. The huge machine creaked and groaned; but it began to turn out work at an increased rate. He was known, feared, loved, and obeyed . . .'¹

Fisher was irritated over that concomitant of all wars — a massive bureaucracy of officers at desk jobs. ' . . . every conceivable sort of billet seems to have been made and filled up, and the Admiralty is really like a hive of bees! There are more Naval Officers in uniform at the Admiralty than in the Channel Fleet, I believe!' (Fisher to Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson, January 21st, 1915). Nor had he any patience with stupidity or with second-class performances. At the same time he was quick to give credit and praise where they were earned, as in this private letter to Admiral de Chair, commanding the 10th Cruiser Squadron, early in 1915:

I've just been looking into the splendid work done by your blockading squadron, and I cannot refrain from expressing my admiration of the way your Captains, Officers and men must have all worked to attain such results in the face of such terrible bad weather and appalling dangers, and none too splendid ships for such very arduous work. I have told the First Lord, and the Commander-in-Chief, I think you should all be publicly praised, but the fact is strict secrecy is so necessary in the important work you are carrying out.²

Much of the Admiral's energy (too much, say his critics) went into the task of constructing a vast armada of ships of every type, since he sensed that the war would be of long duration.

Lord Fisher hurled himself into this business with explosive energy. He summoned around him all the naval constructors and shipbuilding firms in Britain, and in four or five glorious days, every minute of which was pure delight to him, he

¹ Bacon: *Fisher*, II, 161-2. Churchill puts it this way: ' . . . his drive and life-force made the Admiralty quiver like one of his great ships at its highest speed' (*The World Crisis*, I, 460).

² E. Keble Chatterton: *The Big Blockade* (London, 1932), p. 13.

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presented me with schemes for a far greater construction of submarines, destroyers and small craft than I or any of my advisers had ever deemed possible.¹

Specifically, 612 ships (mostly of his own design) were arranged for on November 3rd. They were of all shapes and sizes, from 5 battle cruisers of 33 knots (later reduced to 32) and light draught, to overtake and annihilate the many fast light German cruisers, to 37 monitors and 200 motor barges.

This tremendous new Navy, for it was nothing less [Churchill has testified] was a providential aid to the Admiralty when more than two years later the real German submarine attack began. Its creation on such a scale is one of the greatest services which the nation has owed to the genius and energy of Lord Fisher.²

The dreadnought design was a brilliant conception — Fisher wisely saw that in battle the big gun would outrange and defeat a larger number of smaller guns — but he overdid the idea when he built the wartime battle cruisers. Whereas all previous British battle cruisers had a primary armament of eight 12- or 13½-inch guns, the *Repulse* and *Renown* carried six 15-inch guns, the *Courageous* and *Glorious* four 15-inch guns, and the *Furious* one 18-inch gun. (The *Furious* was originally designed for 15-inch guns; this was changed to two 18-inch after the Falklands, but in the end only one was mounted, the other being commandeered by Haig in 1917 as the ship was being completed.) Before he left office Fisher had prepared a design for a very fast battle cruiser of 'exceptionally light draught', armed with six 20-inch guns! Particularly the three ships with four guns or less had not sufficient rate of fire to produce a hitting pattern against a fast-moving target. It was an error similar to the construction of the *Victoria* and *Benbow*, each with two big guns, some thirty years before. The error was not so bad in the nineteenth century, because ships were expected then to fight at very short range. There is the further criticism of the three light battle cruisers, that, in Churchill's words:

Although possessing many marvellous qualities never hitherto combined in a ship of war, they were light in the bone; and the

¹ *The World Crisis*, I, 456-7. Fisher often reiterated that, until he arrived, nothing had been done in the way of construction since the war started except to 'accelerate one submarine'.

² *Ibid.*, I, 459. Churchill gives the number of ships in the 'new Navy' as 590, which appears to have been the number actually completed. Fisher's correspondence is not consistent on the number. *Memories*, p. 88, gives a breakdown of the 612 by class of ship.

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Navy always considered them wanting in the structural strength and armour which the new conditions of war more than ever required. None the less, their parent loved them dearly and always rallied with the utmost vehemence when any slur was cast upon their qualities.¹

Not so well known is the vital part Fisher played in the development of small so-called S.S. (submarine scout) airships — small airships with a speed of 50 miles per hour — to combat the submarine menace. On his second day in office he called a meeting at the Admiralty 'of all interested in the air'. A few weeks later he had his first airship! It was due to his policy in office, and encouragement out of office, that two years later, when the most serious crisis occurred in anti-submarine warfare, there were airships and airship stations around the coasts which could protect the convoys when they reached the narrow waters, where lay the greatest dangers.

There is general agreement that Fisher's Falkland Islands strategy was a masterstroke. He acted with lightning speed after the Coronel disaster, which had occurred, owing to previous faulty fleet dispositions, the day after his return to the Admiralty. He ordered out the battle cruisers *Invincible* and *Inflexible*, and peremptorily demanded that they sail on November 11th (they had arrived at Devonport on the 8th), over the protests of the dockyard authorities that they needed a week to get the ships ready. The ships sailed on the 11th

¹ *The World Crisis*, I, 459. See also Douglas S. Jordan: 'Fisher's Folly — the Fabulous Furious' (*U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, June 1955). However, it is only fair to point out that the five new battle cruisers had immense speed, heavy guns, and unprecedented light draught of water, to enable them to absolutely dispose of enemy light cruisers and to follow them into shallow waters. They were also meant for service in the Baltic. In view of the many references in Fisher's correspondence to these battle cruisers, it may be useful to append this reference table:

<i>Name of battle cruiser</i>	<i>Laid down</i>	<i>Completed</i>	<i>Armament</i>	<i>Speed</i>	<i>Draught</i>
<i>Repulse</i>	Jan. 1915	Aug. 1916	6 15-in. 17 4-in.	31.7 Kn.	27 ft. mean
<i>Renown</i>	Jan. 1915	Sept. 1916	6 15-in. 17 4-in.	32.6 Kn.	26½ ft. mean
<i>Courageous</i> *	Mar. 1915	Jan. 1917	4 15-in. 18 4-in.	32 Kn.	21½ ft. mean
<i>Glorious</i> †	May 1915	Jan. 1917	4 15-in. 18 4-in.	32 Kn.	21½ ft. mean
<i>Furious</i> ‡	June 1915	July 1917	1 18-in. 11 5½-in.	31½ Kn.	21½ ft. mean

* Converted to carrier, 1924-1928.

† Converted to carrier, 1924-1930.

‡ Fitted before completion with flying-off deck forward about 160 ft. long. Further conversion in 1918: flying-on (landing) deck, 284 ft., installed aft. Reconstructed in 1925, with a flush flight deck 700 ft. long.

and reached Sturdee just in time for him to catch von Spee's squadron at the Falklands (December 8th) and to practically annihilate it. Fisher always cherished this exploit as his wartime *chef d'œuvre*. Admiral Bacon's comment is pertinent:

It had been the wont of his detractors to assert that he was a mere builder of ships, a reactionary Admiral without any real strategical or tactical instincts. Falkland has given the lie to these criticisms. The instinct whereby he dispatched a force that would not merely beat but annihilate, and the taking of risks in so doing from which others had shrunk, were indeed worthy of Nelson. So also was his impatience to brook the slightest delay. Experience and thought had given him a sure judgment in these matters. . . .

Not only did it [the Falklands victory] free the operations in the Cameroons of danger, but it removed a grave menace to our trade in three oceans. It left our cruisers free to deal with the commerce-destroying enemy ships without the ever-present possibility of being recalled, and concentrated, to meet a powerful squadron; and, perhaps most of all, it gave renewed confidence to our Fleet and the Fleets of our Allies.¹

And we can appreciate today that Fisher was absolutely right in feeling, from January 1915 on, that the Grand Fleet was not making the most of its opportunities — that war was *fighting*. 'It's all quite haphazard, any initiative. When the Germans kick our bottoms, then we move, but d—d slow at that!'² His very ambitious Baltic Scheme had at least the merit that it aimed at a vigorous offensive. There is, however, near unanimity among both the Admiral's critics and supporters that this project was a hair-brained one that offered no chance of success. 'The essence of tragedy', says John Masefield, 'lies in deceit caused by some obsession.' Fisher was fatally susceptible to the obsession of a big alluring plan.

The Baltic Scheme was a plan first prepared in the early autumn of 1914 (the printed paper — a first edition? — is dated November) in close collaboration with Julian Corbett, the distinguished naval

¹ Bacon: *Fisher*, II, 178-9.

² Undated Fisher note (January 1915?). 'We have done nothing else this whole war but lose opportunities! As I told you last night, the one most awful thing in war is "*the careful man*"! He's the man with the one talent! Shove him into outer darkness where there is grinding and gnashing of teeth!' (Fisher to Churchill, February 26th, 1915; *The World Crisis*, II, 301).

historian. Fisher wrote to him on December 3rd, 1919: 'It's a wonderfully valuable paper, only surpassed by your immortal article in the *Nineteenth Century* [February 1907] . . .' But it is clear that, while Corbett probably gave Fisher the germ of the idea and did most of the actual writing, the paper was, in substance, Fisher's work. This is brought out in Corbett's letter to Fisher of December 19th, 1914: 'In the enclosed memo I have endeavoured to state your case for the Baltic as well as I can, setting out such objections as occurred to me and meeting them to show the difficulties had been considered.'¹

The opening words of the paper, in bold type, were: 'On the possibility of using our Command of the Sea to influence more drastically the Military Situation on the Continent.' Let it be said here that Fisher had long been an ardent believer in Britain's traditional strategy of amphibious warfare, the strategy of exploiting the mobility given by sea power. He had, before becoming First Sea Lord in 1914, urged that the Expeditionary Force be used, not as the War Office was using it, as an appendix to the French left wing, but landed in Belgium, on the flank of the German advance. After returning as First Sea Lord he still fought to put the British troops in Belgium — Ostend and Zeebrugge must not be left in German hands — and to threaten the German Army in France. He also played with the idea of a landing on the Frisian coast or the coast of Schleswig-Holstein. But the project closest to his heart was the Baltic Scheme.

The plan (in contempt of geography, say the critics) called for landing a Russian army in the spring on the Pomeranian coast 'WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE OF BERLIN OR SO AS TO THREATEN THE GERMAN COMMUNICATIONS EAST-WARD'. This would revive 'the fatal stroke of 1761', when the Russians had occupied most of Pomerania.

¹ The text of the Baltic paper is reproduced in *Records*, pp. 217-22, with italics in place of the large capitals in the original paper, and with this prefatory note: 'This paper was submitted for my consideration by Sir Julian Corbett in the early autumn of 1914.' Two paragraphs are omitted in *Records* after the paragraph on p. 221 (*Records*) ending, '... we are enjoying neither the one advantage nor the other'. The two paragraphs in question read:

'The main practical objections to the course proposed are two. One is the condition of the North Sea after war; but this in any case must be very bad; and here also it may be argued that any measure which will hasten the restoration of normal conditions for trade is worth considerable additional sacrifice of a temporary nature.

'The other practical objection is the danger to the communications of our own fleet when it is in the Baltic. This appears serious in view of the difficulty of securing an advanced base so long as the Scandinavian Powers remain neutral; but possibly it may be overcome by restricting our mining to a certain latitude.'

These two paragraphs were, seemingly, in the final version of the paper (early winter of 1914-1915), although the present writer has seen them only in a reprint dated August 1917.

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The first and most obvious difficulty attending such an operation is that it would require the whole of our battle force, and we could not at the same time occupy the North Sea effectively. We should, therefore, lie open to the menace of a counterstroke which might at any time force us to withdraw from the Baltic; and the only means of preventing this — since the western exit of the Kiel Canal cannot be blocked — **WOULD BE TO SOW THE NORTH SEA WITH MINES ON SUCH A SCALE THAT NAVAL OPERATIONS IN IT WOULD BECOME IMPOSSIBLE.**

A number of the fastest Atlantic liners were fitted as minelayers and a 'prodigious' number of mines were ordered. Corbett (in his letter of December 19th) saw the mining proposal as the one 'unfortunately rather obvious objection' to the whole scheme which he could not answer:

If it is possible for us to make the North Sea untenable with mines, is it not even more possible for the Germans to play the same game in the Baltic? Perhaps you see a way of meeting this — it is sure to be taken by those who have no stomach for your plan.

There is no record of Fisher's reaction. He may have felt that the last paragraph of the Baltic paper met this objection: 'The risks, of course, must be serious; but unless we are fairly sure that the passive pressure of our fleet is really bringing Germany to a state of exhaustion, **RISKS MUST BE TAKEN TO USE OUR COMMAND OF THE SEA WITH GREATER ENERGY . . .**'

The Prime Minister 'suppressed' the Baltic paper, and that was the end of it. Though it never received any serious consideration, Fisher continued to hope, right down to the War Council on May 14th, 1915, that his 'main scheme of naval strategy' would win favour and be attempted that summer. Admiral Bacon's epitaph on the scheme is worth reproducing *in extenso*:

It is strange that this project should have been universally condemned without ever having received detailed examination. . . .

There was no insuperable difficulty, from the naval point of view, in landing the troops and in keeping up communication with Riga. That we should have lost a considerable number of

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ships is certain; but the ships used would largely have been ships built for the special purpose; they would have been cheap, and with small crews, and it must not be forgotten that the Germans would also have lost ships. . . .

If the same scheme for landing which was invented and prepared for the Belgian coast in 1917 had been applied to a Pomeranian landing, and if the exact spot for landing had been kept secret, there is little doubt that two Divisions, with the whole of their impedimenta, could have been landed in half an hour, and another two Divisions on the same day. Other troops could have followed at the rate of two Divisions daily. . . .

The subsequent protection of the line of communications . . . was intimately bound up with a descent by our ships on the Frisian coast, carried out at the same time, whereby the Elbe would have been threatened. Extensive mining operations of the Sound and Fehmern Belt would, of necessity, have been undertaken; and the Baltic should have been flooded with submarine boats.

It is impossible to say, now, whether the scheme would have survived the detailed and critical examination essential before such an operation could be justifiably undertaken . . . Scientific and thorough preparation would certainly have caused many of the objections which have been hastily advanced to fall into insignificance. . . .

The final verdict is now immaterial; but, in all fairness, everyone must agree that the conception was a bold one, which, if successful, offered such substantial advantages . . . that it ought to have received, at the time, the most careful and complete consideration. It should certainly not have been shelved, contemptuously, as impossible. It may well be acclaimed in future years as a sign of genius, and not of madness, on Lord Fisher's part.¹

Fisher always believed that the war would have been won in 1915, (1) had the B.E.F. been landed at Antwerp in August 1914, on the flank of the German advance, instead of being frittered away as an adjunct to the French Army on the main front; (2) had Schleswig-Holstein been attacked and the Kiel Canal destroyed; and, simultaneously, (3) had the British Fleet bottled up the German Navy, by sowing the North Sea with 'thousands upon thousands of mines', and

¹ Bacon: *Fisher*, II, 187-91.

landed a Russian army on the Pomeranian coast. These are all debatable propositions.

Also debatable is the correctness of Fisher's position in the controversial Dardanelles-Gallipoli strategy. With the perspective of time and with the historical material now available, the campaign is no longer seen as a reckless gamble. It may well have been 'the most imaginative conception of the war, and its potentialities were almost beyond reckoning'.¹ There can, however, be no question that Fisher's instinct was in complete accord with British naval thought.

The genesis of the operation was an urgent Russian telegram of January 2nd, 1915, asking for a demonstration against the Turks to relieve pressure on the Russian army in the Caucasus. At a War Council (a committee of the Cabinet plus Balfour) meeting on January 13th, the decision was reached, largely on the basis of Kitchener's support and Churchill's eloquence, that 'The Admiralty should prepare for a naval expedition in February to bombard and take the Gallipoli Peninsula, with Constantinople as its objective'. Fisher and Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson, both as usual present in an advisory capacity only, kept their silence. But on January 7th Fisher had told Kitchener that the proposal for a purely naval operation at the Dardanelles was 'damnable', and he repeated this to Lieutenant-Colonel FitzGerald, Kitchener's Personal Military Secretary, on January 19th. 'That's why Kitchener followed me from the War Council table on January 28th. He knew I was bloody-minded and would resign.'² The Admiral appreciated the formidable obstacles represented by Turkish mines and forts in the Narrows, and believed that only a joint military and naval operation could promise success. Strongly reinforcing his objection on technical grounds was the knowledge that the operation would involve a serious drain on naval forces in home waters, 'the decisive theatre'. Also, and important, 'the Baltic Project was the real focus of all my purposes at the Admiralty'.³

Seeing how the tide was running at the War Council meeting on the 28th, which definitely confirmed the decision to attack the Dardanelles by ships alone, Fisher was about to leave the room and write out his resignation. Kitchener followed him, 'and was so earnest and even emotional that I should return that I said to myself

¹ Alan Moorehead: *Gallipoli* (London, 1956), p. 364.

² 'Notes for the Dardanelles Committee', undated Fisher memorandum of 1916.

³ *Loc. cit.*

after some delay: "Well, we can withdraw the ships at any moment, so long as the Military don't land", and I succumbed.'¹ But at no time during this crucial meeting was Fisher (or Wilson) asked to give his views, although it was perfectly clear to everybody present that he was not at all in sympathy with the proposal. 'It was known even to the charwomen at the Admiralty.'² That afternoon he was persuaded by the First Lord to go along with the project 'because I understood that there were overwhelming political reasons why the attempt at least should be made'. Moreover, he wished to ensure the rapid completion of the large building programme he had initiated and which would 'enable the Navy to deal such a decisive blow in the decisive theatre (in Northern Waters) as would shorten the war ...' Finally, there was this consideration:

In my judgment it is not the business of the chief technical advisers of the Government to resign because their advice is not accepted, unless they are of opinion that the operation proposed must lead to disastrous results.

The attempt to force the Dardanelles, though a failure, would not have been disastrous so long as the ships employed could be withdrawn at any moment, and only such vessels were engaged, as in the beginning of the operations was in fact the case, as could be spared without detriment to the general service of the Fleet.³

But it has seemed to many observers, then and since, that Fisher was seriously at fault in not translating his opposition into a flat refusal to sanction the operation, particularly at the January 28th War Council. Thus, the Dardanelles Commission report of 1917 blames Fisher and Wilson for not having put their views on record on January 13th and 28th, even though they were not asked for their opinions. 'We have not the least doubt that the attitude which they adopted at the War Council was dictated by a strong sense of duty. But we have no hesitation in recording our opinion that it was a

¹ *Memories*, p. 59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³ The second of the three quotations is from Fisher's narrative prepared by him at the time of the Dardanelles Commission (1916), and the other two are from a summary of his evidence prepared for the Chairman (*Memories*, pp. 67, 72). The latter document was prepared for the Admiral by Reginald McKenna. Fisher was enraged when the Commission failed to include his summary in its report. 'It was dastardly of Cromer not to insert or quote [it] . . . *It's unanswerable*. May the Lord have mercy on him! *D—d if I would!*' (Fisher to Lambert, March 12th, 1917). However, a dissenting memorandum by one of the Commissioners, Walter F. Roch, introduced some key excerpts.

mistaken sense of duty.' There is the other side. Andrew Fisher, the High Commissioner of Australia, in a minority report,

dissented in the strongest terms from any suggestion that the Departmental Advisers of a Minister in his company at a Council Meeting should express any views at all other than to the Minister and through him, unless specifically invited to do so. I am of opinion it would seal the fate of responsible government if servants of the State were to share the responsibility of Ministers to Parliament and to the people on matters of public policy.

Sir Thomas Mackenzie, the High Commissioner for New Zealand, entered a similar dissent.¹ The Admiral's own opinion as to why he made no protest at the meetings of the War Council is contained in this succinct statement:

Mr. Churchill knew my opinion. I did not think it would tend towards good relations between the First Lord and myself nor to the smooth working of the Board of Admiralty to raise objections in the War Council's discussions. My opinion being known to Mr. Churchill in what I regarded as the proper constitutional way, I preferred thereafter to remain silent.²

After the January 28th War Council, the objective of the Government remained the same, but the necessity for employing a large military force became daily more apparent as the inability of the Navy to make much headway was proven. The first naval bombardment, on the outer forts, took place, with indecisive results, on February 19th, and was renewed on February 25th; the second bombardment occurred on March 18th, with heavy ship losses. On March 23rd the idea of a purely naval attack was definitely abandoned; it was decided to postpone further operations until adequate troops could be assembled. Joint operations began on April 25th, when Anglo-French forces were landed on both shores of the Straits. Severe losses were suffered with small results. In the following months the British forces hung on to tenuous holds on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Finally, in December 1915 and January 1916, the Peninsula was evacuated.

Already on March 4th we find Fisher bemoaning to the First

¹ *Dardanelles Commission. First Report*, pp. 28, 44-5.

² From Fisher's summary for the Chairman of the Dardanelles Commission (*Memories*, pp. 72-3).

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Lord: '*The more I consider the Dardanelles the less I like it!* No matter what happens it is impossible to send out anything more, not even a dinghy! and why the hostile submarine has not appeared is a wonder.'¹ There was less objection for a while after the decision of March 23rd, but not for long.

The change in my opinion as to the relative importance of the probable failure in the Dardanelles began when the ever-increasing drain upon the Fleet, as the result of the prosecution of the Dardanelles undertaking, reached a point at which in my opinion it destroyed the possibility of other naval operations which I had in view, and even approached to jeopardizing our naval supremacy in the decisive theatre of the War.²

Fisher's intense loyalty to Churchill, who had installed him as his principal (albeit unofficial) adviser in 1911 and, in the face of formidable opposition, had brought him back in 1914, was being corroded. The end of their association was approaching.

23: TO LADY JELlicoe

Langham House
August 16th, 1914

Dear Lady Jellicoe,

A few lines to cheer you up! I went to London and had my *tête-à-tête* with Winston [August 15th], and afterwards saw all the war arrangements. All seemed to me first class and most satisfactory. He was full of admiration and regard for 'J. R. J.'! (*and well he may be!*), and he felt and spoke so nicely of the fearful strain of nightly going out to sea, etc. *Burn this.*

Give J. R. J. my best love when you write and say he is always in my thoughts, but I have no misgivings of the final result. Every day that goes by makes it worse for Germany on the sea. Our policy should be that of the serpent, not the lion!³

Don't bother to answer,

F.

¹ *The World Crisis*, II, 301.

² From Fisher's summary for the Chairman of the Dardanelles Commission (*Memories*, p. 72).

³ 'Every day's delay is good for our Fleet – that is my opinion – and every day strangles German commerce more and makes the German food dearer' (Fisher to Lady Jellicoe, August 16th, 1914).

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24: TO COMMANDER THOMAS E. CREASE¹

Langham House
August 18th, 1914

SECRET AND PRIVATE

My dear Crease,

I've greatly enjoyed your letter this moment come! I promised Winston to come up again for a *tête-à-tête* lunch to-day or to-morrow, but between ourselves (*and to go no further*) my escapade last Saturday, coming up to Winston, has given me a 'set-back', so I'm in bed again, much to the doctor's delight, against whose orders I went up! However, I shall be fit again in a few days and will probably come up next Saturday, but I'll let you know. I can't of course put on paper what has passed between me and the 'Big Wigs' as regards this war, but very fine decisions were taken by Winston, and the German High Sea Fleet were EXCEEDINGLY annoyed! The grandson of a very great friend of mine is serving in that Fleet, *so I know for sure!*

I. Jellicoe

II. Our mobilizing prematurely²

III. Our purchase of the two Turkish ships³

humbugged them damnably, and so they call it 'our selected moment' and not theirs as they intended! *I think Jellicoe has upset them the most, though!*

Personally I should have shot Sir Berkeley Milne for the *Goeben* (like Admiral Byng, '*pour encourager les autres*', as Voltaire said! only no court-martial — a tedious subterfuge for evading responsibility).⁴

¹ Afterwards Captain Thomas E. Crease; Assistant to the Chief W/T Censor at the Admiralty, August-October 1914. He became Fisher's Naval Assistant when the Admiral returned to Whitehall.

² Fisher's words convey the wrong impression. It has often been supposed that the mobilization was undertaken at short notice because of the imminence of war. The fact is that it had been announced in Parliament in March that the Admiralty would hold a test mobilization of the Fleet in July, in place of the usual annual naval manoeuvres. Consequently, during the period July 15th-23rd the entire naval force in home waters was on a war footing. Dispersal had begun, but had not gone too far, when, on July 26th, in view of the tense international situation, the Admiralty ordered the Fleet not to disperse.

³ On August 5th the Admiralty had requisitioned the two Turkish dreadnoughts which were just being completed in English yards: the *Reshadieh* (renamed *Erin*) and the *Osman I* (renamed *Agincourt*).

⁴ Admiral Sir Berkeley Milne, Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, 1912-1914, had not been able to prevent the German battle cruiser *Goeben* and her escort, the cruiser *Breslau*, from turning east, after coaling at Messina (a neutral port), and slipping through the Dardanelles (August 10th). On August 30th the Admiralty issued a statement which 'approved the measures taken by him in all respects'. But Milne received no further employment. As regards the unhappy Admiral John Byng, contrary to his

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

Sir Berkeley Milne had no excuse whatever for not surrounding Messina with all his entire force right round the harbour mouth — CLOSE UP! *as if international law mattered a d—n!!* and the Italians would have loved him for ever! . . .

Yours always,

Fisher

25: TO ARNOLD WHITE¹

Langham House
August 23rd, 1914

Private and Secret

My dear Arnold White,

Your kind letter arrived about the same time as one from Crease full of the same message² (he is at the Admiralty now in the *inner circle!*), and some working-man two days ago (who I never saw before nor know who he is) said to me, 'My Lord, a long while ago you told us "*to sleep quiet in our beds*"!³ We do! and it's the Navy what's done it!'

There's nothing altered since I left the Admiralty 4 years ago, and all the ships afloat were then perceived! Where are all those *gobemouches* [simpletons] headed by Beresford⁴ and other mutinous Admirals who predicted that on the day of war armed German tramps would appear on every ocean and sweep British commerce off the seas! Quite possibly now they will pose as having done all that was done to give us our Navy as it is with 13½-inch and 15-inch guns and not one German ship with more than 12-inch!

I think I would just now have shot a couple of Admirals possibly, had I been First Sea Lord! (However, that's a minor point!) I think to have about a quarter of a million of Germans and Austrians

¹ White, the naval journalist, 'Vanoc' of the *Referee*.

² Crease 'says not a comma altered of all the arrangements made when we were at Admiralty, and Sir Graham Greene [Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty, 1911-1917] told me the same last Saturday!' (Fisher to Pamela McKenna, August 20th, 1914).

³ At the Guildhall banquet, November 9th, 1907. See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 150, n. 1.

⁴ Fisher's pet *bête noire*, on the retired list since 1911, was a Conservative M.P., 1910-1916.

explicit instructions he had fallen back on Gibraltar and had left Minorca to its fate (1756), after an indecisive engagement with a French fleet off Port Mahon. He was tried for alleged neglect of duty and was shot on the quarter-deck of the *Monarque* in Portsmouth. Candide, witnessing the scene, was told: '... in this country it is found necessary from time to time to shoot an admiral *pour encourager les autres*'.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

in this country free to shoot Sir E. Grey,¹ the Prime Minister, or any one else they like, and distributing false information broadcast as they are now doing, is the most quixotic bit of criminal folly that ever any nation at war ever committed! There's not a single loose Englishman in Germany! I'm told the Police give the Germans and Austrians tea while they are waiting to register!

I had some momentous moments 6 days before war was declared and it became '*our selected moment*' and not that of the Germans! *but this is secret between you and me!* . . .

Yours always,

Fisher

A fine motto for the Navy: '*Business as usual during alterations*'! I got a bad attack of pleurisy being up late at Admiralty on July 30 — only just getting right now.

26: TO CECIL V. FISHER²

August 25th, 1914

Dearest Cis,

I have two more letters from Deterding³ about Beatrix. Isn't it wonderful, when he is attending to 40 millions sterling of business to take this petty trouble? (It's the elephant rooting up an oak tree and picking up a pin, both with his trunk!) The Dutch ex-Minister for War — I can't make out his name — is sending a Dutch gentleman with *carte blanche* as to money to Mannheim and will bring them all to London, but he much doubts if the German Government will allow a British Admiral to leave Germany, even though retired and an invalid, and he says he knows the English are being kindly treated.

That d—d fool Lady Neeld gave poor Mother a sleepless night by writing yesterday and saying that Beatrix was *not* at Mannheim! because some old hag that Lady Neeld knew had not seen her at Mannheim! I've written Lady Neeld a 'STIFFENER' this morning! She's as bad as Uncle Bill!⁴ . . .

¹ Sir Edward Grey (afterwards Viscount Grey of Fallodon), Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1905-1916.

² Cecil Vavasseur (afterwards second Baron) Fisher, the Admiral's only son.

³ Henri W. A. Deterding (afterwards an honorary K.B.E.), Director-General of the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company.

⁴ 'Uncle Bill' was Admiral Sir Frederic William Fisher, younger and sole surviving brother of Lord Fisher, President of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, 1911-1914. Lady Neeld was Beatrix Neeld's sister-in-law.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

The doctor has been and says I'm better, but fusses about my talking to anyone at all or seeing anyone at all. I think it such rot! . . .
Your loving father,

F.

27: TO GEORGE LAMBERT¹

Langham House
August 28th, 1914

Private and Secret

My dear Lambert,

It's VERY pleasant to me to hear from you. I went to London on Saturday week for a *tête-à-tête* with Winston, and that gave me a 'set-back', but I am once more quite right and go for a good long walk every day in Richmond Park, and think over some of the poor d—d fools that Winston has now surrounded himself with! *I'm not sure he don't like it!* (What a clear-out I would have!!) And certainly two British Admirals ought to be shot, AND WINSTON KNOWS IT!! I wrote to him and said I supposed they would be promoted instead, as they are both Court sycophants. However, this is the price we ought to pay for a disguised republic, and the d—d strain of snobbishness that pervades the feudal relics of the British race — no court-martial, but shoot them! Also, of course (as possibly you know), I am dead against having sent our soldiers on the Continent. *Simply criminal folly!* And if I am not mistaken, the masses of our countrymen agree with me. Neither Press or Parliament represents the real thought of the people. Our Navy and *our Navy alone* is our one and abiding SURE defence. DOUBLE IT IF YOU DON'T FEEL SAFE! But to pile on '*play-soldiers*' as we are now doing, and for which we could have 60 Dreadnoughts and 600 submarines, is really silly! Only it's so tragic! However, what's the good of my letting fly at you! So no more.

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

An affectionate admirer has sent me an old letter of mine of 1911 in which I explicitly state that Armageddon would occur in 1914, and that Jellicoe would be Admiralissimo! As Jellicoe was then a junior Rear-Admiral, I admit it was a big prophecy, but my friend little knew I had written the same thing in 1905! I enclose rather a good account and picture of Jellicoe (ONLY MARRED BY ITS ALLUSIONS TO

¹ Afterwards first Viscount Lambert; Civil Lord of the Admiralty, 1905-1915.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

ME!), sent me by an American beauty with £40,000 a year, and she won't marry! And I am not free! Neither Dukes nor Princes in the least affect her! And all her frocks are from Poiret! She startles Ham Common when she comes here!

28: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Langham House
August 29TH, 1914

My beloved Jellicoe,

I've this moment got your letter of August 23rd!¹ It has taken six days to get here! I am so rejoiced to hear from you and also to hear from you of my dear Madden² being such a good '*backer-up*'! but please don't write any more. You have too much to occupy you! and I just love to write to Lady Jellicoe and Mrs. Madden to keep them amused and interested and their spirits high!

My relations are a bit strained just now in '*the high regions*' because of Admiralty passing over and condoning damnable effete ineptitude, and, secondly, because of a total want of appreciation of certain big things that are imperative. However, I have to remember that '*I have had my hour*'! and so I endeavour to possess my soul in patience.³

The temptation for you to do something will always be exceeding great, I know, but '*your strength is to sit still*' till '*the day*' arrives! . . .

You don't seem to have Dreyer⁴ with you, as I had hoped. I think the German Fleet will have to obey the orders of the military caste,

¹ '5 minutes ago I got a beautiful letter from Sir John Jellicoe, BREATHING SUCH A SPIRIT!! It's all too splendid and quite worth war!' (Fisher to Cecil Fisher, August 29th, 1914).

² Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet, first Baronet) Charles E. Madden, Jellicoe's Chief of Staff, 1914-1916, afterwards First Sea Lord, 1927-1930. He was Jellicoe's brother-in-law, the two having married sisters.

³ 'I am not quite hitting it off with Winston just at present. *I want someone shot and he won't shoot!*' This will help explain this extract: 'I regret to say I cannot refrain from being violent, and that puts my temperature up! (D—n the temperature!)' (Fisher to Lady Jellicoe and J. A. Spender, respectively, August 29th, 1914). Churchill remembers 'one occasion, when inveighing against someone whom he thought obstructive, he became so convulsed with fury that it seemed that every nerve and blood-vessel in his body would be ruptured. However, they stood the strain magnificently, and he left me with the impression of a terrific engine of mental and physical power burning and throbbing in that aged frame' (*The World Crisis*, I, 401-2). The quotation in the text is from Dryden's 'Paraphrase of Horace': 'Not Heaven itself upon the past has power/But what has been has been, and I have had my hour.' See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 377, n. 1.

⁴ Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Frederic C. Dreyer, commanding the dreadnought *Orion*, 2nd Battle Squadron, 1913-1915, already before the war regarded as a great gunnery expert, second only to Sir Percy Scott. He 'has the brain of a Newton' (Fisher to Corbett, March 10th, 1908).

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

as represented by the Generals round the Emperor, and the German Fleet will get the same sort of orders as Villeneuve got from Napoleon, without any relation whatever to sea purposes. The German Navy will be treated like a German *corps d'armée*.¹

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

29: TO CECIL V. FISHER²

Richmond, Surrey
September 6th, 1914

Dearest Cis,

Winston Churchill got me on the telephone this morning and wants me to be the head of something — some sort of Naval Brigade, I think, and A. K. Wilson and Beresford, etc., but the telephone not very clear. He said he had written, but I had never got the letter. Probably some German spy postman has sent it to Berlin! I've promised to have a *tête-à-tête* lunch with him at the Admiralty on Tuesday to see plans, etc. . . .

I am much better to-day. We had Sir Frederick Treves³ a long time with us to-day. He is always wonderfully interesting. He says I must take Horlick's Malted Milk, which always pulled all his patients through after all his operations!

Of course, I told Winston Churchill I am ready to do any mortal thing, *even to co-operating with Beresford!* if any good for the War.⁴

Your loving father,

F.

¹ 'Trafalgar dead against all naval considerations. Napoleon moved the Fleet out of Cadiz for purely military reasons and dead against all naval considerations. He was working for the battle of Austerlitz and did not care a d—n for the battle of Trafalgar, so will it be with the German Fleet!' (Fisher to Pamela McKenna, late August 1914).

² The letter pertains to the organization (started on August 17th) of two Naval Brigades so as to form, with the Marine Brigade, a complete Naval Division for the occupation of advanced naval bases. That, at any rate, was the original idea.

³ Sir Frederick Treves, first Baronet, the brilliant surgeon to King George V.

⁴ 'Winston forced me to be a "Colonel" [Honorary Colonel of the 1st Naval Brigade of the Royal Naval Division]. I did not wish for it. I expect I shall be Governor of Calais in about a fortnight from now! I lunched with Winston yesterday, and he's bent on shoving me in somewhere!' (Fisher to Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson, September 9th, 1914). A few days later, 'on the impulse of the moment' Fisher sent a message to the 1st Naval Brigade, telling them 'to look forward to splendid duty both by sea and land. Our Island history is full of glorious deeds of Sailors' Brigades in every war. . . .' He was to have joined the Brigade on September 15th, but his doctor vetoed it. The entire Royal Naval Division was sent to Antwerp early in October, where, with some French assistance, it succeeded in delaying, but could not prevent, the capitulation of the city to the Germans (October 10th).

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

30: TO MRS. GERARD MEYNELL¹

Langham House
September 16th, 1914

Dear Esther,

. . . for some weeks yet I am not to go a-visiting, except emergency visits to Admiralty (and generally I go to bed next day from violence, as I usually lose my temper up there! 'The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.' Winston said he hadn't heard that before!)*. . .

What a pity you can't be my Secretary! (but I can't afford one!) I think I ought to take off [the] embargo about your writing about me if it would bring you an honest penny! Only I can't be any party to what you write, as I've refused nine proposals now, all most affectionately made to me! I've left all my papers to Jellicoe. I'm always going to sort them out, but I never begin!

Yours till the Angels smile on us!

Fisher

31: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA²

Langham House
September 16th, 1914

Private and Confidential

My beloved Pamela,

. . . Well! Yesterday a bigoted Tory came to see me! (You know I have bosom friends among the Tories. Balfour, Bonar Law, F. E. Smith,⁴ and others.) This man implied to me that the present Cabinet '*all and several*' had so captured the whole Country by their magnificent conduct of affairs prior to and during the War that the Tories were not in it!!! That is to say, a General Election would

¹ Mrs. Meynell was E. Hallam Moorhouse, the authoress, who had written several books on naval history.

² Churchill had heard it before, and from Fisher, in 1908! See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 155.

³ Pamela McKenna, wife of Reginald McKenna, onetime First Lord of the Admiralty (1908-1911), Secretary of State for Home Affairs, 1911-1915.

⁴ Andrew Bonar Law, Conservative M.P. since 1900, Leader of the Conservative Party, 1911-1921, and later Prime Minister, 1922-1923; F. E. Smith (afterwards first Earl of Birkenhead), the renowned advocate, Conservative M.P., 1906-1918, later Lord Chancellor, 1919-1922, and Secretary of State for India, 1924-1928. Smith was head of the Press Bureau, 1914-1915.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

sweep the Country in favour of the present Government. Hence the intrigue is on no account to have a dissolution even at the appointed time! *Please tear this up!* And don't trouble to answer, and I have no doubt whatever that dear Reggie and all his colleagues realize this situation. Only I write it as seemingly being the absolute belief of those '*in the know*' amongst the Tories, nor do I feel a traitor in writing this, as I never disguise my unalterable conviction *that a Tory Government would be perdition!* and they don't seem to love me any the less for saying so!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

Secret. Winston, when Sir George Armstrong was first nominated to be a censor,¹ asked me to see F. E. Smith and get him to shunt him, but I declined, as I did not want to go messing in dirty waters, but I can tell you that Armstrong is an unmitigated blackguard, whose one sole object is to vilify and damage the present Government, and he is one of the backstairs reptiles who crawl round Sir C. Cust² and others at Court, as chief purveyor of every little thing that can damage or estrange the Government. But somehow he has got some big hold over Walter Long, who I believe he (Armstrong) trotted round, paying Long's expenses, and thereby F. E. Smith, I presume, was got hold of! Keep this secret and burn!

Please burn, and don't trouble to reply. I am still seedy, or would come and see you.

32: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

October 3rd, 1914

My beloved Pamela,

We had a 'spiffing' lunch yesterday, but I ought to have introduced the '*40-thousand pounder*' to Reggie! I never thought of it! So stupid of me! *She is excessively clever.* But I am writing really to send this:

[Attached newspaper cutting]

'One of the thousand queer canards which are flying round London is a report that Prince Louis of Battenberg, First Sea

¹ Sir George Armstrong, second Baronet, had been appointed Chief Naval Censor at the Press Bureau at the outbreak of war.

² Commander (afterwards Captain) Sir Charles Cust, third Baronet, Equerry to King George V, 1892-1931.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

Lord of the Admiralty, is "confined in the Tower of London". Against it may be set the undoubted fact that Prince Louis took part in a conference with Lord Kitchener and others at 10, Downing Street on Wednesday evening.¹

which won't be news to you, but we happened to talk of it at lunch. Isn't it funny! We have three damnable war difficulties:

I. Our directing Sea Lord played out.¹

II. The Declaration of London.²

III. The German explosive in the submarine torpedoes MANY, MANY times more powerful than ours! It took over an hour for our submarine explosion to sink the little German cruiser *Hela* (or some such name) [September 12th]; it took only 7 minutes to sink our big armoured cruiser.³

I. The German Emperor's brother [Prince Henry of Prussia] in close communion.

II. Mother German and married to a German, and his sister, wife of a German Admiral and born in Germany, is Crowe.⁴

III. The Master General of the Ordnance is a 'von'!⁵ and we ought to have been wildly making this German explosive for the last year at least, if not for three years!

What a lovely story Leo Maxse⁶ could make of all this!!!

Let us pray!

Yours affectionately,

F.

¹ The resignation on October 28th of Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg, First Sea Lord since 1912, was prompted by the 'painful conclusion that at this juncture my [German] birth and parentage have the effect of impairing in some respects my usefulness on the Board of Admiralty' (*The World Crisis*, I, 400-1). This was an allusion to the vicious stories that were circulating in the press and public about Prince Louis's alleged dubious loyalty to the Allied cause. However, Churchill's acceptance of the resignation (October 30th) was no doubt prompted in part by a factor to which Prince Louis did not allude, nor does Sir Winston in his writings - namely, that Prince Louis was believed to be lacking in imagination and vigour.

² The Declaration of London (1909), defining the nature of contraband and the rules of blockade in time of war, had been signed by Great Britain and the other great naval powers, though never ratified by Parliament, owing to naval and Admiralty opposition.

³ Fisher may have been referring to the *Hogue*, which went down ten minutes after being torpedoed. See p. 61, n. 2.

⁴ Eyre (afterwards Sir Eyre) Crowe, Senior Clerk at the Foreign Office, 1906-1912, later Permanent Under-Secretary, 1920-1925. He had been the principal English delegate at the International Maritime Conference which drew up the abortive Declaration of London.

⁵ Major-General Sir Stanley von Donop, Master General of the Ordnance, 1913-1916.

⁶ L. J. Maxse, proprietor and Editor of the Germanophobe *National Review*, 1893-1932.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

33: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Langham House
[early October 1914]

Private and Secret

My beloved Pamela,

I was hurried yesterday on my way to see a cousin in the Irish Guards, at Millbank Hospital, or would have said more. I see *The Times* this morning takes up the letter I left with you. The whole point is that Winston has surrounded himself with third-class sycophants, and so is autocratic! and is taking charge of Dunkirk instead of the Navy!¹ It was *pure murder* sending those big armoured ships into the North Sea! and H. H. Campbell (like the d—d sneak he is!) stays in harbour when he ought to have hoisted his flag in one of the other ships of his Squadron, and been at sea with them, and taking his responsibility.² I understand his excuse is that his own proper flagship was coaling or something in harbour, but the immemorial usage of the Navy is, even in peace-time, that if the Admiral's ship is for some reason unusable, he hoists his flag in some other ship. This in peace-time, *let alone in wartime!* However, he's going to be white-washed, I expect, by a Court of Enquiry into the three poor devils of Captains of the ships lost, whereas he, Campbell, is the culprit who would have been tried had he been in his proper place. . . .

Yours till Hell freezes,

Fisher

¹ Churchill had been in the Dunkirk-Antwerp area, October 3rd-6th, assisting in the defence of Antwerp. See *The World Crisis*, I, 338-58, especially p. 358, for his reply to 'the reproaches and foolish fictions which have been so long freely and ignorantly heaped upon me. I could not foresee that the mission I undertook would keep me away from the Admiralty for more than forty-eight hours . . .'

² The incident was the loss of three old armoured cruisers of the Southern Force, *Aboukir*, *Cressy*, and *Hogue*, torpedoed by a German submarine on September 22nd while on patrol in the Broad Fourteens, with the loss of over 1,400 officers and men. Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Henry H. Campbell commanded Cruiser Force C, part of the Southern Force, which was under Rear-Admiral Arthur H. Christian. But Fisher took no action against Campbell when he became First Sea Lord. His antipathy to him goes back to his role in the Beresford Inquiry of 1909. See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 252.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

34: TO MRS. R. W. LOVETT¹

October 7th, 1914

Dear Mrs. Lovett,

Just got your letter and I am all right again, though exceedingly busy and a great deal in London now. All is going well, I hope, with the War, but, as I told you once before:

‘Let not him that putteth his armour on boast himself like him that putteth it off!’

but the spirit manifested by the whole people is very wonderful. We shall have *for certain* an army of four millions of men if the War lasts, *and every single soldier of them is an enthusiastic volunteer!* All tumbling head over heels to go to the War, and they are really absolutely fit for fighting after over three months’ training, such is their intense desire for perfection! They work night and day to make themselves fit! It’s all *very, very* wonderful! That 4 days’ retreat of our army in France after the Battle of Mons was our redemption, because it showed that the ordinary common soldier was every man a hero! They all fought ‘*on their own*’. They had no orders and no maps, and fought in groups without officers except here and there. Not one surrendered, and for four days they kept retreating and firing, and no sleep, but, luckily, plenty to eat and drink owing to the splendid feeding arrangements of the English Commissariat Department. . . .

Never again shall we ever go to Germany or Austria. What a splendid system of lying the German Ambassador at Washington² has to influence American opinion!

Truly,

F.

35: TO CECIL V. FISHER

October 11th, 1914

Dearest Cis,

. . . We are still busy about Beatrix & Co., involving no end of letters and telegrams. I think I’ve written some forty letters and telegrams already, and endless visits to Mannheim refugees in Lon-

¹ Mrs. Lovett was an old American friend, living in Boston, Massachusetts.

² Count von Bernstorff, German Ambassador at Washington, 1908-1917.

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don, but still it will be worth it if we get them safe away. We have no less than 5 different schemes in progress at this moment! . . .

The War is in a far more critical stage than generally supposed. The Germans have really done wonders! It's no use blinking the truth that they understand the art of war better than any nation on earth, and have been successful accordingly.

Fondest love to dear Jane.¹

Your loving father,

F.

I had to write 9 sheets to Lord Rosebery² yesterday to quiet his panic! PRIVATE. A German submarine has been under his windows!

36: TO JOHN LEYLAND³

Langham House
October 15th, 1914

Private

My dear Leyland,

. . . Under the powers conferred by the 'Defence of the Realm Act' I should have shut up the offices of the *Morning Post* because of encouragement to the Enemy! There are heaps and heaps of d—d stupid things being done and vital things being left undone. E.g., the German Fleet should be mined in as Togo⁴ mined in the Russian Fleet at Port Arthur. Not that he didn't want them to come out, but clearing the channel by the Russians gave him the warning signal they were coming out! and his base, like Jellicoe's, was unavoidably and necessarily hundreds of miles away. As fast as the Russians picked the mines up, Togo put down fresh ones. Thousands upon thousands of mines were thus used! And these mines with wire entanglements are the only bar to submarines.

Please burn.

Yours,

F.

¹ Jane Morgan Fisher, wife of Cecil Fisher.

² The fifth Earl of Rosebery, onetime Liberal Prime Minister (1894-1895), and still influential in party circles.

³ Leyland, the well-known naval journalist.

⁴ Admiral Heihachiro Togo had commanded the Japanese Fleet in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

37: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Langham House
October 28th, 1914

Private

My dear Jellicoe,

Your letter in answer to mine is quite clear and convincing. One of our merchant steamers being sunk by a German mine off the North Coast of Ireland is most unpleasant, but yet not altogether surprising, unless we entirely shut up the North Sea at both ends and stop all traffic because of these deadly modes of warfare being equally fatal to neutrals as to ourselves.

Still, war is war, and we are bound to have big disasters and must steel our hearts and minds, *for if only we can save the crews* (which are irreplaceable), we can afford great losses in vessels of war of all natures.

I think myself the time has arrived for you to get into Portland and Portsmouth and Devonport. You would be there quite handy; indeed, more so than elsewhere, and all hands would have a quiet time and some relaxation from the great tension resulting from not having a torpedo-defended anchorage elsewhere. These are only my passing views and I am a pure outsider, as I have no idea at all of the scheme of Admiralty strategy now in force, except that any fool looking at the map would say Diego Garcia a sure spot for the *Emden*, and we never sent there any ship to lie in wait for her, and, sure enough, we hear she has been there.¹

I saw Mrs. Madden the other day, looking splendid, and also Lady Jellicoe — my daughters with her yesterday. Well! Keep up your spirits. All will be well, and have no fear whatever but that you all will have hearty support under all circumstances.

Yours always,

F.

¹ The fast German light cruiser *Emden*, in Chinese waters at the outbreak of war, had been inflicting heavy losses on British shipping in the Indian Ocean since mid-September. She had been at the coral atoll of Diego Garcia early in October. Her career was ended by the British light cruiser *Sydney* on November 9th.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

38: TO LORD RANKSBOROUGH¹

Ritz Hotel
Piccadilly, London, W.
November 1st, 1914

My beloved Friend,

You must come to lunch with us *very often* with your dear wife when we get into house at Admiralty in a few days time. *I have some lovely stories for you!* Here is one!!! When the King said to Winston and the Prime Minister (to dissuade them!) that the job would kill me, Winston instantly replied, 'Sir, I cannot imagine a more glorious death'!!!² Wasn't that lovely? Queen Alexandra and Princess Victoria³ simply heavenly to me, and they both looked quite lovely! I wish I could have married both of them!

Your loving,

F.

39: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Ritz Hotel
November 3rd, 1914

My beloved Jellicoe,

It was splendid seeing you! *Do fix meeting at Perth at earliest convenient date.* And mind like Oliver Twist you '*ask for more*' as soon as you can. I should have four more trawlers and four more wireless

¹ Major-General the first Baron Ranksborough, Extra Equerry to Queen Alexandra (consort of King Edward VII), 1910-1921.

² 'I was well aware', Churchill has written, 'that there would be strong, natural and legitimate, opposition in many quarters to Fisher's appointment, but having formed my own conviction I was determined not to remain at the Admiralty unless I could do justice to it. So in the end, for good or for ill, I had my way' (*The World Crisis*, I, 402). It is a fact that King George was adamant against Fisher's appointment. 'I did all I could to prevent it & told him [Churchill] he was not trusted by the Navy & they had no confidence in him personally. I think it is a great mistake & he is 74. At the end I had to give in with great reluctance.' Later that day he used 'the same arguments' with Asquith, 'but had to approve' (diary entries of October 29th). 'The Prime Minister replied that he gathered from the First Lord that there was no one else suitable for the post. . . . Mr. Asquith believed that Lord Fisher's appointment would be welcomed by public opinion' (from a memorandum by Lord Stamfordham, the King's secretary). But when the King received Fisher on the 30th, he had to admit, 'He seems as young as ever' (diary entry of October 30th). This material is in Harold Nicolson: *King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign* (London, 1952), pp. 251-2. Finally, there is this interesting comment by Fisher, found among some notes he prepared on October 20th, 1919, pertaining to the May 1915 crisis: 'The King, on October 10 [20th?], 1914, obstructed my being First Sea Lord for ten days, and Lord Stamfordham proposed six candidates in lieu of me on six successive days, but they were all rejected.'

³ Princess Victoria, second of King Edward VII's three daughters.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

yachts, especially with this trade route in the North Sea that you will have to supervise. I think if you enclose your requisitions under cover to me, it will expedite matters.

We have made a wonderful coup (after you left) with someone abroad for very rapid delivery of submarines and small craft and guns and ammunition.¹ I must not put more on paper, but it's a gigantic deal done in five minutes! That's what I call war!

Yours for ever,

Fisher

I think a German naval move is *very, very* imminent, all dependent on the German Army crisis near Ostende.²

40: TO JAMES F. REMNANT³

Ritz Hotel

November 5th, 1914

Beloved Friend,

SO grieved to miss you! I'm EXCEEDING busy!

I've just told dear Garvin⁴ that WAR is 'Great Conceptions' and 'Quick Decisions!' 'Think in Oceans!' and '*Shoot at Sight!*'

I'm stirring up accordingly!

Yours till death,

Fisher

41: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Ritz Hotel

November 8th, 1914

My beloved Lambert,

I'm grateful for your kind memory of my strenuous fight against 6-inch guns between decks. The moment I left the Admiralty in

¹ The deal (for 24 submarines, etc.) was made with 'the great Schwab of the American Steel Corporation. He is more English than the English! He had two millions sterling more orders than Krupps last year! and is far bigger than Elswick and Vickers put together' (Fisher to Lambert, November 3rd, 1914). Charles M. Schwab was chairman of the board of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, 1913-1939. See *Records*, p. 187. Fisher was for ever grateful to Schwab for his aid in effecting the release of the Neelds.

² To Jellicoe on November 7th: 'My view is that something may happen about November 17 (new moon day!), but it's only a sort of presentiment, though there are signs to the observant eye!'

³ Afterwards first Baron Remnant; Conservative M.P., 1900-1928.

⁴ J. L. Garvin, Editor of the *Observer*, 1908-1942, and of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1912-1915.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

January 1910, we went back to the 'Good Hope' system, which I had killed effectually by the Dreadnought Committee. In consequence we have more to face yet.¹

Yours for ever,

Fisher

P.S. The person chiefly responsible is the present King, who blazed away against my policy to all and every person who came near him!

42: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Ritz Hotel
November 9th, 1914

Private

'And now we shan't be long!' (Popular ditty)

My dear Arnold White,

... we have a wily enemy! Also we are reaping just now the harvest of faulty arrangements! However, let us hope that will soon now pass off. When you come to see me, remind [me] of the Tortoise, the Hare, and the Greyhound! It's an instructive parable!

Yours always,

Fisher

43: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
November 10th, 1914

Dear Lord Fisher,

I trust that the decision to send another battle cruiser away from the Grand Fleet will be reconsidered.² I endeavoured to express my

¹ This is all with reference to Coronel. Churchill has written: 'The sea was high, and the main deck 6-inch guns both of the *Monmouth* and of the *Good Hope* [cruisers] must have been much affected by the dashing spray. The German batteries, all mounted in modern fashion on the upper deck, suffered no corresponding disadvantage from the rough weather' (*The World Crisis*, I, 422). See Letter No. 49.

² Jellicoe had received orders that day to detach the battle cruiser *Princess Royal* to reinforce the squadron watching the German armed liners in New York. 'This last order produced continuous protests from Sir John Jellicoe, and led to an interchange of telegrams and letters in which the Commander-in-Chief dwelt upon every aspect of his

views in a telegram to-day, and trust they will prevail. It is really essential that we should have a *superiority* in this class of ship in the North Sea, since we constantly send them near Heligoland, and it is inviting disaster to send them there if they can be 'mopped up' by the Germans. I explained that *Tiger* is absolutely unfit to fight yet. Even if trained (which she is not), her one dynamo that is effective cannot do the work of fire control instruments, lighting, etc., and she would be simply a present to the Germans. Even when she is fit, we shall be no stronger, since I *must* send the others to dock one at a time. I raised no objection to 3rd Battle Squadron going,¹ though many people think it is a dangerous separation of force, but I should have raised the strongest objections had I thought we were to lose three battle cruisers as well. It is quite probable I may find myself fighting the High Sea Fleet with only my present force, as Burney may not join up in time, and as the H.S.F. will certainly be at full strength — or they won't fight — it is risking serious disaster to be much weaker than they are. Their gunnery is good, and their swarms of torpedo craft will give them a great advantage. I really do not think we should run any further risk.

I write in haste to catch the mail, but I do beg you will not take away a battle cruiser. I am perfectly certain that the Germans will

¹ On November 2nd the 3rd Battle Squadron (the pre-dreadnought 'King Edwards' and 'Duncans') had been ordered south, to Portland, to join the flag of Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet, first Baronet) Sir Cecil Burney, Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet, August-December 1914. The purpose of the move was to increase the security against a German incursion into the Channel.

dangers and weakness and the Admiralty, while insisting on their decision, endeavoured to reassure and placate him. . . . The requirements of the Commander-in-Chief were, however, hard to meet. If at any time from any cause, two or three ships were absent from the Grand Fleet for a week or two, the Commander-in-Chief drew severe comparisons between the German Fleet and his own. He was a master of this kind of argument. From his own side he deducted any ship which had any defect, however temporary, however small. . . . He sometimes also deducted two or three of the most powerful battleships in the world which had newly joined his command because they were not trained up to the full level of efficiency of the others, and these were absolutely blotted out as if they were of no value whatever. He next proceeded to deal with the enemy. He always credited them with several ships more than we now know they had, or were then thought likely to have. . . . One must admit, nevertheless, that the withdrawal of the *Princess Royal* inflicted a very serious injury upon the Battle Cruiser Squadron, and that Sir David Beatty might have had to fight an action without any margin of superiority during her absence. In this matter, however, Lord Fisher entered the lists in person' (*The World Crisis*, I, 442-4).

What Fisher feared was that von Spee might come through the Panama Canal, rout the West Indies Squadron, then come north and release the liners (See Fisher to Jellicoe, November 12th, 1914; *ibid.*, I, 444). The *Princess Royal* left Cromarty for Halifax on November 12th. After the destruction of the German squadron at the Falklands, December 8th, she was kept in the West Indies to assist in hunting down the German light cruiser *Karlsruhe* (which, unknown to the English for a long time, had sunk through a mysterious explosion on November 4th). The *Princess Royal* finally left for Scapa Flow on December 19th.

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not be so foolish as to send *one* battle cruiser into the Atlantic. If they send any, they will send *all* and we should want all to go in search of them. The risk run by the *Suffolk*, etc.,¹ is not half so great as that run daily by my slow cruisers intercepting trade. It would be better far to send some 'Duncans', on which the cruisers could fall back.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

44: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
November 11th, 1914

Dear Lord Fisher,

A In your letter of 7/11 you say: 'I'm sure you'll AT ONCE telegraph to me personally in cypher *if you want anything or wish anything altered, or doubt the wisdom of any orders you get.*' You went on to say that 'you expect something to happen about November 17th, etc.' Admiralty telegram No. 219 did not indicate that the matter therein ordered was so urgent that the *Princess Royal* must leave at once. The glass was falling rapidly and if she had started last night she would have been 'lying to' all day to-day. I accordingly carried out what I understood to be your wishes as expressed at A above. The telegram No. 219 did not ever actually order *Princess Royal* to go; it merely stated a preference for her. I will not reiterate the arguments I used in my telegram No. 15, and those sent to-day, but merely point out how unsuitable the *Princess Royal* is for this service. Her coal expenditure for the distance run is not far from *double* that of *New Zealand*, and she will be useless on arrival till coaled and oiled, and whilst there she will be constantly coaling and will have to go 1,000 miles each time she coals (500 each way).

I presume she is intended to meet battle cruisers, as *New Zealand* could dispose of anything else. I argue that German battle cruisers can't possibly go there, as they (judging by our vessels) will have no coal left on arrival, and have no coaling base. I may be all wrong but can see no fallacy in my arguments, whilst I am sure no one will dispute the evils of dispersion of force. Admiralty telegram No. 244 of to-night is a very direct reprimand to me for not sending *Princess*

¹ The *Suffolk* was a cruiser in the New York area, the other ships being a pre-dreadnought, two cruisers, and an armed merchant cruiser.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

Royal at once, and I submit that in the action I took I was only carrying out what I took to be your wishes.

Your mention of November 17th made it to my mind specially important not to weaken the Grand Fleet just now. We are weak compared to the Germans in light cruisers in home waters, and this emphasizes the necessity for a powerful battle cruiser squadron. Under present conditions our battle cruisers are inferior to the Germans and I should not get the information I require as to their dispositions. I will of course do the best I can with the force at my disposal, but much is expected of the Grand Fleet if the opportunity arises, and I hope I shall not be held responsible if the force is unequal to the task devolving upon it, which task, in my eyes, is the annihilation of the High Sea Fleet.

I am grateful for the exceedingly prompt response to my request for destroyers, parent ships for them, and for trawlers, and for many other things, but I confess to feeling sore at the manner in which my representations as to *Princess Royal* have been received.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

45: FROM VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY¹

H.M.S. *Lion*

November 15th, 1914

Dear Lord Fisher,

Filson Young² arrived and gave me your greeting, which pleased me so much that I am tempted to unburden my soul on the subject of the strategical situation in the North Sea. In times such as these, when every move may affect the fate of nations, it is no use mincing matters. I know you prefer plain facts, and are ready to consider all points of view. I am sure you will not misunderstand my motives and will act on my representations if you think them sound.

Consider the situation. The North Sea is infested with mines and submarines, which, however, are almost entirely confined to the vicinity of our coasts. The Grand Fleet cannot enter it with safety.

¹ Afterwards Admiral of the Fleet the first Earl Beatty (Acting Vice-Admiral until February 1915); Commander-in-Chief of the 1st Battle Cruiser Squadron, Grand Fleet, 1913-1916. In February 1916 Beatty was appointed Vice-Admiral, Battle Cruiser Fleet, at which time the Fleet was subdivided into three squadrons. About October 1916 the title was altered to Admiral, Battle Cruiser Force.

² Lieutenant (R.N.V.R.) Filson Young had been appointed to Beatty's staff in the *Lion*.

But the battle cruisers, to whom (in your own words) 'speed is armour', are thereby protected from submarines and have little to fear from mines in *open water*. Up till a few days ago I felt confident that they could take on and defeat any enemy force except a battle squadron of the most modern type. When the 4 enemy dreadnoughts and 4 cruisers were reported at sea on the 3rd November, they could not have stayed out 24 hours without being brought to action by us with a superior force. Had they done so, I should have been off Heligoland at daylight the next morning and would have cut them off from their base. This move may be repeated any day (particularly when they learn of the departure of the *Princess Royal*, *Invincible* and *Inflexible*), and it may take a more formidable shape, as, for instance, a bombardment of our east coast towns or a sweep across the North Sea as a deliberate challenge to our known reduced force, i.e. the *Lion*, *Queen Mary* and *New Zealand*. ['Is the *Tiger* zero?' — F.] Modern battles prove more than ever that numbers only can annihilate. ['ROT! It's gunnery, *not* numbers!' — F.] No amount of gallantry and determination will counteract superior numbers, which will destroy inferior without ANY compensating damage being inflicted by the force destroyed. ['Gunnery! Gunnery!! Gunnery!!! SCOTT! SCOTT!! SCOTT!!!'¹ — F.] I might hear at any moment that 4 enemy battle cruisers, the *Blücher* and 6 light cruisers are in the North Sea. I am then faced with two alternatives, either to run very grave risk of sacrificing my squadron without compensating gain, or to debase the prestige of the British Navy by leaving the enemy in undisputed command of the North Sea. This, when our coast towns are perhaps being bombarded, is unthinkable. Submarines, if time and weather permit their overtaking the enemy, could at best only drive him off without defeating him.

You probably are not aware that the *Tiger* is not yet fit to fight. Three out of her four dynamos are out of action for an indefinite period, and her training is impeded by bad weather, which might continue for many weeks at this time of year, and at present she is quite unprepared and inefficient. Should the High Sea Fleet come out, our need for the missing battle cruisers will be bitterly felt. With the *Princess Royal* I should have no fear, and with the 4 battle cruisers could and would take their 5 ships with a light heart. I am sure that no one realizes more clearly than you do that the main

¹ Admiral Sir Percy Scott, first Baronet, the prime mover in the gunnery revolution around the turn of the century, had retired in 1913. On the outbreak of war he was appointed to the Admiralty for special service (-1918), as an adviser on the gunnery efficiency of the Fleet, anti-submarine measures, etc.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

object of all strategy is to muster overwhelming strength in the decisive area, and the decisive area is the North Sea.

If you could see your way to give me back the *Princess Royal*, this all important First Principle would be complied with, and we should be capable of really commanding the North Sea under all circumstances. I know the C. in C. is absolutely of one mind with me, or I would not write to you as I do. And it is only because I know that you are great enough to consider suggestions from those to whom you entrust the execution of your plans that I bombard you with this — [?].

Yours sincerely,

David Beatty

['So ONE ship only added to him makes the difference between glorious victory or ineffable defeat!' — F.]

46: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

November 16th, 1914

My beloved Jellicoe,

I'm distressed above measure that you should have been harried in any way by Admiralty action. Certainly I would have sent *New Zealand* had I known all you tell me. I was assured *Princess Royal* was without doubt the one to go, as we had every reason to believe that *Scharnhorst* & Co. were making rapidly for the Panama Canal and New York to free the *Vaterland* & Co. [liners], all armed and ready to start, and *Princess Royal*, so I was told, had been used before for Canadian escort because the best ship for the purpose. Anyway, there was never the very faintest idea of finding fault with you. I did not make out the telegram, but I see it is faulty and open to the construction you were justified in putting upon it. It won't happen again. Just then I was sore pressed. I have had a great clear out, which has taken up much of my time.

We spent hours over your letter before deciding on Rosyth. I think our reasons are good.¹

¹ Jellicoe had suggested that he be reinforced by moving the 3rd Battle Squadron to Cromarty, one hundred-odd miles south of Scapa, where it could be covered by the destroyer flotilla there and by the cruisers of the Grand Fleet. The Admiralty, however, stationed the Squadron at Rosyth. As explained to the C.-in-C. in an Admiralty letter of November 16th: 'The importance of preventing the enemy from making a serious attack on our coast and getting away without being engaged makes it imperative to have a force nearer the probable points of attack than either Scapa Flow or Cromarty . . .' (*The World Crisis*, I, 445).

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

I am hustling the *Queen Elizabeth* and hope she will be ready for sea in a fortnight, and I suggest to you she should join Beatty, as her speed, they tell me, will be 28 knots, so obviously her place will be with the battle cruisers. . . .

Yours always,

Fisher

47: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Langham House
November 17th, 1914

My dear Jellicoe,

I sent you a letter yesterday, not a long one. I have to write as the moments are free, such a multitude of events incessantly interrupting, and it don't do to lose the threads, and I am also Winston's shadow on purpose. . . .

I listen with great interest day by day to A. K. Wilson, old Oliver, and Bartolomé¹ discussing your battle line. (We meet daily for an hour or two to discuss the world 'from China to Peru'!) Old A. K. W. wrote to Winston and the Prime Minister that he was now '*Fisher's slave*'! *Can you imagine A. K. W. being a slave!!!* But he works like a horse all day at all sorts of plans for the Belgian and German coast attack. Zeebrugge is now where Tirpitz² is concentrating submarines and 42-centimetre guns. But this is a digression. This *tria juncta in uno*³ I've just described think your battle line already so long that one end will hardly see the other! let alone more than half being able to engage, and hence your enormous advantage in the concentration of gun power in the 13½-gun ships! But to my mind, it is NOT numbers, it is SOLELY '*gunnery efficiency*' that will win the fight. Of course if both Fleets equally good in gunnery, THEN numbers come in! But no excess of numbers, however inordinate, of

¹ Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson had been brought in when Fisher returned. His exact capacity was never defined, but he worked on high-level strategic problems. Acting Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet Sir) Henry F. Oliver, Fisher's onetime Naval Assistant (1908-1910), was brought in by him to replace Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet, first Baronet) Sir Doveton Sturdee as Chief of the Admiralty War Staff, 1914-1917. Fisher could never have worked with Sturdee. His dislike of him went back to 1907, when he had served as Beresford's Chief of Staff in the Channel Fleet. Commodore (afterwards Admiral Sir) Charles M. de Bartolomé was Naval Secretary to the First Lord, 1914-1916 (Churchill, Balfour).

² Grand-Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, Secretary of State for the German Navy, 1897-1916.

³ *Tria juncta in uno* ('three joined in one') is the motto of the Order of the Bath. The expression was used by Lord Nelson and the Hamiltons in speaking of themselves, and Fisher used it in referring to the Esher Committee on War Office reform (1903-1904).

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any use whatever if the guns don't hit the target! And alas! I fear, from what I hear, that our much dispersed ships are much wanting in this quality! (Apparently Milne in the Mediterranean never once gave his ships any chance at all of firing! HE OUGHT TO BE SHOT!)

I hope we shall arrange on the 20th (in three days' time) to order the *Warrior* and *Black Prince* [cruisers] straight from Gibraltar to join you. We are hurrying home the *Duke of Edinburgh* [cruiser] to dock at Malta and join you straight. *Warrior*, *Black Prince* have already been docked at Gibraltar and refitted. Then we are working for the *Minotaur* [cruiser] about November 27 to come straight to you from the Cape, as by then Sturdee will be in the strategic centre to cope with Admiral von Spee and his 5 German ships, or rather 6, as *Karlsruhe* will have joined him. Then the *Defence* [light cruiser] we shall detach and send home to you, and possibly the *Donegal* [cruiser] and 8 destroyers from the Mediterranean. All this will help you along, but you have the fearful drawback of no place for good gunnery exercises except Berehaven, which is so far off and NOT SAFE! We know it is infested now with German-Americans planning to wreck our ships by affording information to submarines (we hope to shoot some of them soon), and Gibraltar is too far off and the weather is bad there also.

A. K. W. is absolutely convinced the German Fleet is not coming out. Kitchener¹ (who spent a long time with me yesterday) EQUALLY CONVINCED that they are coming AT ONCE! (to-day or November 20) with 250,000 troops we know of as available — untouched best men of the first fighting line.

Everyone down South has got to 'butt in' at once regardless of all conditions. Burney from Sheerness with 10 battleships, Stuart Nicholson² from Dover with 6 battleships, Bradford³ from Rosyth with his 8 battleships (I am hustling the *Hindustan* [pre-dreadnought] to rejoin him). We shall mine the German retreat — an excellent plan devised by A. K. W., not interfering with your approach. This plan I will send you by an officer, and Commodore (T) and Commodore (S)⁴ have got their specific orders, and you can come in

¹ Field-Marshal Kitchener was Secretary of State for War, 1914-1916.

² Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Stuart Nicholson, commanding the 6th Battle Squadron, a special service squadron just formed, 1914-1915.

³ Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Edward E. Bradford, commanding the 3rd Battle Squadron, 1914-1916.

⁴ Respectively, Commodore (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet, first Baronet) Reginald Y. Tyrwhitt, commanding the Harwich Destroyer Flotilla, 1913-1919, and Commodore Roger J. B. (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet the first Baron) Keyes, in charge of the Submarine Service, 1910-1914.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

longo intervallo and pick up the *jaded* pieces before the German Fleet returns to the *Jähde*!

No more to-day. Let everyone be optimistic, and *shoot the pessimists*!

Yours,

F.

48: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*

November 18th, 1914

Dear Lord Fisher,

I am more than grateful for your letter of the 16th received this morning, and am much relieved to know that no censure was intended, as I thought I had acted for the best. I quite agree that *Queen Elizabeth* should be with the battle cruisers. What I am anxious to do is to form *two* battle cruiser squadrons, one for each end of the line when line of battle is formed.

Moore¹ should have *New Zealand* and as many 'Invincibles' as possible, and Beatty the rest, unless *Queen Elizabeth* is found to be only a 26-knot ship, in which case I think Moore should go to her with 'Invincibles' under him (a 25-26 knot squadron) and Beatty the 28-knot squadron.

I gathered yesterday from Admiralty telegrams that it was thought there was a chance of the Germans emerging, so was ready all day and stopped work on *Iron Duke's* [flagship] condenser, but nothing having occurred I shall start again to-morrow. We have about 4-5 days more work to complete retubing. I shall be glad when it is over, as we are at 10 hours' notice whilst work is in progress.

I must stick to Scapa now as a base. The alternative is Lough Swilly and my obstruction there has now become useless, there being no one to look after it. Re Admiralty telegram No. 313, I much want to give 'King Edwards' some tactics and a chance at target practice. They badly want both and I shall accordingly ask later to get them up north for it. I can't do either in the North Sea for fear of submarines. We have had a submarine hunt north of Orkneys to-day, catching one on surface, but at *16 knots* the *Skipjack* [torpedo gun-

¹ Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir Archibald Moore, commanding the 2nd Battle Cruiser Squadron, at Rosyth, 1914-1915.

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boat] could not overhaul her and she dived eventually and I fear we have lost her, though I got TBD's out quickly. I hear the American submarines are twin screws, so they are better than I thought when I wrote last.

I shall be *very glad indeed* when 'Minotaurs' join, as with 10th Cruiser Squadron all broken down I can really do nothing to stop German trade.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

49: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 19th, 1914

My dear Jellicoe,

It seems I'm writing you a daily letter! *I hope I don't bore you!* Alas! Perth impossible.¹ Things too critical. Also I have so much to uproot and such a lot of parasites to get rid of. If I don't strike now at these d—d fools, I can't get rid of them later on.

Don't worry about the submarines. We have 95 now on order. Half a loaf is better than no bread! To-day I begin the destroyer campaign — not that I much believe in them. It's d—d little they have done so far. Their guns *never* hit anything. They can't ram a submarine. Three German submarines have been rammed ineffectively by destroyers. The destroyers more damaged than the submarines. 'It's the dog it was that died'! The 'Super-Swift' is the only type — the rest rotten. Lots of rotten things, I fear. Look at the 6-inch guns of the *Queen Elizabeth*. *Awful!* especially those aft. Once the Dreadnought type was departed from, you had disaster. *Vide* Cradock² and his 6-inch guns. They were under water. I'm told all your Fleet wear sea boots in action! What an illumination of the 6-inch gun theory! And all because some hazy mind has got hold of torpedoes fired at miles off that never hit! . . .

We have a fine dress rehearsal of soldiers — 300,000 along the English shore.

'He who would old England win
At Weybourne Hope must first begin.'

¹ See Letter No. 39.

² Rear-Admiral Sir Christopher Cradock, who went down with his flagship, the *Good Hope*, at Coronel.

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I'm told at high water you can put a gang-board on shore from a battleship!¹

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

50: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 19th, 1914

My dear Beatty,

I much appreciate your letter. Don't be downhearted! The German Admiral is now singing 'It's a long way to Tipperary'! Sir E. Grey told me last night the Germans propose landing a hundred thousand men in Tipperary! Some Society is encouraging the Germans — Sein Fein, or some name like that — and we have discovered a nest of Irish-American traitors at Berehaven, *but none of it matters!* The great art of perspective has been missed by the Germans in their conduct of war, and alas! it has been missed in the conduct of the British Navy! Never such utter rot as perpetrated by Sturdee in his world-wide dispersal of weak units! Strong nowhere, weak everywhere! One battle cruiser in each ocean with its attendance of tramps at £3,10.0 a ton, fitted with wireless, would have cleared the world of German pirates and saved the Cradock disaster. One armadillo can lick up millions of ants, and the bigger the ant the more placid the digestive smile! The *Black Prince* is bustling home to join you, so also *Duke of Edinburgh*, *Warrior*, *Minotaur*, *Defence*, and a flock of light cruisers. It's NOT numbers that tell, but GUNNERY! The *Scharnhorst* salvos did the trick on Cradock! *Gunnery, gunnery, gunnery!* All else is twaddle. *Hit the target!*

I am too busy for more now. I'll finish in another letter. This is only the preamble.

Yours always,

Fisher

¹ Weybourne Hope, in Norfolk, is the most easterly point of England. By November 21st, Fisher, no longer momentarily expecting an attempt at invasion, was recommending that part of the army at home be sent to the Continent. To Churchill he wrote: 'Let us entreat and urge Kitchener to send a hundred thousand men AT ONCE to Flanders . . . Kitchener's balance of 160,000 men will amply suffice and the "Ides of March" have passed! The waning moon and the dawning tide [dawn high-tide] will not recur till days following December 10. . . . It has been a splendid "dress rehearsal", tell him, and very reassuring — his mass of men and his mobile guns!' (*The World Crisis*, I, 451).

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51: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 21st, 1914

My dear Jellicoe,

I will see what can be done about sending you the 'M' class [destroyers] at once, but every one in this building wants them for aggressive action down here at the outset! Nevertheless, I believe you are going to have a tough job with the German destroyers accompanying the German Fleet. I am sure you will be strong-minded enough not to be drawn by the Germans when you meet them, and do them all the harm you can at extreme ranges with your 13½-inch guns, my conviction being that they will be bent on closing you for their destroyer tactics and their smaller guns.

We are hustling home to-day the *Indefatigable* and *Indomitable* [battle cruisers] from the Dardanelles, but they will require a refit at Malta en route. They have been scandalously neglected by Milne. He ought to be shot! Sir Berkeley Goeben!

I don't think your going out to the North Sea on Tuesday [November 24th] will result in anything, but, of course, it may. One never knows! Anyhow, you are as safe there as at Scapa, pending completion of obstructions, and you will have 'King Edwards' with you and 3rd Cruiser Squadron, and it will be good for your Fleet to have such an outing.

No time for more. I will expedite to the utmost the patrols and the mining against submarines.

Yours always,

Fisher

52: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

November 21st, 1914

My dearest Pamela,

Too busy to come as yet. I'm glued to my desk. Perhaps you and dear Reggie will lunch here some day if we telephone. I will try you. Just now I'm EXCEEDING busy. Yesterday I lunched with the Prime Minister and danced with his wife, and it quite upset me, as I

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longed so for more seraphs — you and Barbara!¹ ‘You common people of the skies’!²

Your own for evermore,

F.

Postscript. Secret and Private. On December 10th we alter the navigation lights, buoys, etc., which will humbug the Germans and their mass of English-trained pilots employed by our other mercantile marine, and also this will necessitate compulsory pilotage, so we shall thus effectively control the neutral trade now bringing so much money into Dutch and Scandinavian pockets in feeding the Germans! There will be a big howl against me, I expect! I confess it’s a tall order, but my only wonder is that it wasn’t done before!

That malignant little cad, Sir George Armstrong, I have tracked to his lair. I’m going to make a *casus belli* of getting rid of the Press Bureau. One can’t have enemies stabbing one in the back!

I expect we shall have a flying raid on Hull, say, or an ‘insult’ bombardment of Middlesbro! where are our vital steel works, about December 8, or Christmas. December 8 because of the lights being out on December 10, and the waning moon and dawning tide being favourable for landing at daybreak. Christmas Day because of the hope of the Germans of our being happy at that season. ‘*L’homme propose, mais Dieu dispose.*’

53: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
[late November 1914]

My very dear,

Forgive us for not dining. I don’t dine out. Bertrand Dawson³ told me to husband my resources! Though REALLY and TRULY I am more fit and virile than [when] I left the Admiralty more than four years ago! I can’t make it out! *But it’s a fact!* Also I grieve to put you off lunching to-morrow, but unavoidable. Fancy ‘that Margot’ [Mrs. Asquith] letting out about my waltzing with her! I think I

¹ ‘Barbara’ was Pamela McKenna’s sister, the Hon. Mrs. Francis McLaren, now Lady Freyberg.

² A line from Sir Henry Wotton’s poem, ‘On His Mistress, the Queen of Bohemia’. See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 250, n. 2.

³ Sir Bertrand Dawson (afterwards first Viscount Dawson of Penn), physician to the Kings of England (and other members of the royal family) from Edward VII to George VI.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

shocked the Prime Minister at lunch with my brutal and licentious talk! What it is to have a young heart! It plays the devil with one's morals!

Yours for evermore,

F.

To-morrow, if I think of it, I'll send you a new label I've invented for the Admiralty. I stick it on a fellow's back when he's not looking! It has caught on!

54: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

November 25th, 1914

My dearest Pamela,

I want you and your dear Reggie to come here to lunch, so will *you* state a day next week, at 1.45. Don't trouble to write, but telephone. If I did, you might be engaged — and those boys would love to run about the corridors of the First Sea Lord's house. They are immense — and the Italian staircase!

Such amusing things are happening! I can't possibly write them. *The situation is quite lovely!* The King, Kitchener, P.M., and Winston! How wonderful it all is! Yes! 'He'd sooner abdicate'! I never mean to forget or forgive our dear Reggie being so grossly insulted over the Trinity House, when he had been unanimously elected, and the cunning sycophant excusing it to me!¹

Yours for ever and ever,

F.

Lady Londonderry,² Walter Long, and Beresford are the *trio juncta in uno* in full swing again on the old path! *Exempli gratia*:

1. I have quarrelled with Jellicoe.
2. No Admiral afloat trusts me.
3. I am ruining the Fleet.
4. The Admiralty is chaos.

And they think they have absolutely captured *The Times* and Northcliffe³ with his 150 newspapers! Suppose they have! What then? The Tories want to get back, and *they won't!*

¹ See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 369.

² Lady Londonderry, wife of the sixth Marquess of Londonderry, and prominent Beresford supporter in the pre-war Fisher-Beresford feud.

³ The first Baron (afterwards first Viscount) Northcliffe, founder and proprietor of the *Daily Mail*, 1896-1922, and chief proprietor of *The Times*, 1908-1922.

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55: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 28th, 1914

Private

My beloved Jellicoe,

I'm exasperated beyond words at the effete inexcusable management of the anti-submarine defence of all our anchorages! It's quite lamentable to read the official correspondence! I've been the last 48 hours trying to evolve some sort of future efficient action. Why did not Colville¹ get into the train and himself see what was doing? I can never forgive his apathy and maudlin telegrams and waiting for someone else to do something! Alas! He is not the only one! I hope to get even with all of them in due course. We have a regular menagerie of 'Charity Admirals' employed and totally unfitted for the work they are employed on, and the Admiralty is quite full of young Naval Officers who ought to be at sea doing simply clerk's work at the Admiralty. The corridors are crowded with them as I walk along! I should never have known but for this order to wear uniform!

Without doubt your Fleet wants a thorough rest — a long rest. Your trawlers seem wonderfully effective in frightening the submarines, so we gather from intercepted communications. Of course the whole efforts of everyone should have first been concentrated on making Scapa Flow submarine-proof, instead of which Portland, Dover, the Wallet, and half a dozen more places all begun together, with the physical impossibility of getting all the material necessary for every place at once. Magnificent tugs suited for such work are stupidly employed in examination service up the Humber, where any of these mass of yachts available would have done better, and so on and so on!

We have got 4 fast cruisers hustling home rapidly, but I suppose you will attach [them] to Beatty. You won't have a 'look in' if the German battle cruisers come out, as they will hustle over and hustle back after bombarding, but I hope we shall catch them with our submarines and our destroyers, but I see no way of preventing their coming to bombard, as we have nothing south to meet them. What a howl there will be!

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) the Hon. Sir Stanley Colville, Commander-in-Chief, the Orkneys and Shetlands, 1914-1916.

The real strategic centre that ought to have been made submarine-proof with lavish expenditure and stupendous outworks is the HUMBER. *That's where you ought to be!*¹

56: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 28th, 1914

Private

Dear Beatty,

I admit the force of all your arguments. It's probable that at this very moment the *Princess Royal* is bagging the *Karlsruhe*, as the *Karlsruhe* has just sent her decoy, the *Crefeld*, to entice the *Lusitania* [liner] to come to her 'sinking' assistance! We have nought else that can catch the *Karlsruhe*, and the eventuality (not yet improbable) has still to be faced of the 'Scharnhorst and Co.' coming through Panama Canal to New York to release the mass of armed German liners ready there to emerge into the Atlantic. Why the *Vaterland* has not 'nipped out' already is beyond me! Remember, the last new German battle cruiser (the *Derf[f]linger*, or some such name) is even later commissioned than the *Tiger*, and we know has had very little gunnery practice, so I don't think you are in a bad way if you concentrate yourself, as I know you are doing effectively, on getting the *Tiger* into fighting efficiency. We can send up any number of anything animate or inanimate to help you, if you send me a personal telegram. As I told Jellicoe, had I known of the *New Zealand* having more coal endurance, I would have taken her.

I'm in the position of a chess player coming into a game after some d—d bad moves have been made in the opening of the game by a pedantic ass, which Sturdee is, has been, and always will be! It's very difficult to retrieve a game badly begun.

¹ But perhaps the most sickening of all the events of the war was the neglect of the Humber as the jumping-off place for our great Battle Cruiser force, with all its attendant vessels . . . for offensive action at any desired moment, and as a mighty and absolute deterrent to the humiliating bombardment of our coasts by that same fast German Battle Cruiser force. The Humber is the nearest spot to Heligoland; and at enormous cost . . . the Humber was made submarine-proof, and batteries were placed in the sea protecting the obstructions, and moorings laid down behind triple lines of defence against all possibility of hostile successful attack. However, I had to leave the Admiralty [1910] before it was completed and the ships sent there; and then the *mot d'ordre* was Passivity; and when the Germans bombarded Scarborough and Yarmouth and so on, we said to them *à la Chinois*, making great grimaces and beating tom-toms; "If you come again, look out!" But the Germans weren't Chinese, and they came . . .' (*Memories*, p. 132).

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Please tell me the address of your brother-in-law, Marshall Field, as he has married A PERFECT GEM and who I had hoped would have been my daughter-in-law, only another American gem intervened! Evelyn Marshall is really the very nicest of her sex. I worship the ground she treads on, and her mother is like her.

I'm so exasperated at finding we have fewer submarines than when I left the Admiralty 4 years ago! That comes of having a bloody fool called Briggs as Controller!¹ I'm doing my best to ruin all these fools.

Yours always,

Fisher

P.S. I'm hoping very soon you will have four fast cruisers — they are rushing home to be with you.

57: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 30th, 1914

Private

Dear Beatty,

Just a line, though I have already answered your letter, to impress on you that I entertain no malice. Quite the contrary! For it's your duty to fire off those broadsides! You're looking out for your own yardarm. *Quite right!* But there are a damned lot of other yardarms! *N'importe.* 'Now we shan't be long'!

On December 10th we are going to alter all the lights and buoys! This will humbug the Germans and their mass of English-trained pilots. Also, as it will necessitate compulsory pilotage, we shall now be able to control effectively the neutral traffic now so remunerative to Dutch and Scandinavian pockets in feeding Germany! There will be a fearful howl against me, I suppose! My only wonder it wasn't done before! though I confess it's a big order and we had to get a smuggled Act of Parliament the last day of the Session. I mention all this as I think in consequence that the Germans will have their big naval operation on December 8th, with the waning

¹ Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Charles J. Briggs, Third Sea Lord and Controller, 1910-1912. Now a vice-admiral, he was not holding any appointment.

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moon and dawning tide in their favour, before we put the lights out! . . .

You have a splendid new Commander coming up called Fountaine — he is simply A.1. *Take care of him*, for I know him well. No damned humbug about him!

Yours,

Fisher

If you want anything at all for the *Tiger*, telegraph to me direct. *Any mortal thing you want you shall have.*

58: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 30th, 1914

My dear Jellicoe,

Never have any fear that your letters are not *most welcome*, and the whole point is that you SHOULD tell me all these *most exasperating* episodes such as you quote to me so rightly in your letter just come. It's abominable that such utter stupidity should harass you. I simply delight in your giving me chapter and verse, so as to go for these idiots with all my strength. I regret I can't agree with you as to not making changes, because I simply cannot exist with some of these criminal fools that hamper the efficiency of our Fleet and throw such unnecessary burdens on yourself and others by their ineptitude and utter want of initiative and 'push'!¹

59: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
December 2nd, 1914

My dear Lord Fisher,

. . . The trawler patrols outside are now very strong and I think should be effective. I shall, however, be glad when the moon wanes, as I think an entrance at night is almost easier with a good

¹ Much of the remainder of the letter is missing. The C.-in-C. was notified in this letter (see the second half of Jellicoe's letter that follows) of the alteration of the lights and buoys to be made on December 10th. This, presumably, was the first Jellicoe had heard of it — nine days after Fisher had communicated this intelligence to Pamela McKenna! (See Letter No. 52.)

moon than by day (of course with conning tower awash). I can't believe the Germans will waste their battle cruisers over a bombardment. I should think it is just what our submarines would pray for, and if they got back without heavy loss, I should be pretty surprised. At any rate, I am perfectly certain that it would be the faultiest possible strategy to base our fleet with the idea of preventing a bombardment. It would be even a worse mistake than the United States panic about their coasts in the Spanish-American War. We thought the Americans great fools on that occasion. I have looked at the Humber as a base. It is quite impossible. A few reasons are:

1. You could only get in about 12 or 14 large ships.
2. No submarine obstruction could remain efficient in the strong tides there.
3. A destroyer boom would be essential, as it is so well within range of German destroyers.
4. It is so easily mined off the approaches.
5. When there is a fog *anywhere*, it is sure to be there. I am sure Scapa can't be beaten as a base for the Grand Fleet. . . .

I am longing to get cruisers out into the North Sea again, and the moment I have enough they shall be there, and I will have the Battle Fleet out when *Iron Duke's* 6-inch mountings have been made efficient. Until then I am doing very useful gunnery and torpedo work *inside* Scapa Flow, 2 or 3 ships daily, and I shall get the Battle Squadron out one at a time if the weather is decent. It is a pity to knock the ships about in a gale of wind with no real object in view. . . .

December 3rd, 1914

Just received yours of the 30th. I am so very glad you are altering the lights. It will be one of the best things that has been done during the war.

As regards December 8th, if you really consider this a likely day, why should we not all go out for two or three days? Of course, if the raid or insult is far south, we might miss them, but there is the chance it may be towards the north. I am bound to say I think a few days earlier is more likely for a raid. Going out, say, on the 7th would delay *Iron Duke's* 6-inch mounting repairs (the men arrive on the 5th), and as I doubt very much whether we can safely fire the guns at present, I am anxious to get on with it, also retubing *King George V* condensers, but if you have any really definite idea of the 8th, we must delay repairs a bit.

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I quite agree that Xmas Day is likely, but, of course, as you know, the Germans keep Xmas even more than we do. They will, however, expect us to be all drunk that day.

If I came out for December 8th, I should leave at dusk, December 7th, meet Beatty and 3rd Battle Squadron next morning in about the latitude of St. Abb's Head.¹ . . .

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

60: FROM VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

H.M.S. *Lion*

December 4th, 1914

Dear Lord Fisher,

Thank you for your letter. I am content, and feel we are moving along a straight and narrow path with ultimate victory at the end. And that you will send me back my Princess when she has accomplished the seduction of the Pirate. In the meantime the efficiency of the *Tiger* grows apace, and I hope very shortly to have made up leeway and have her ready in all respects — she only commissioned in November, whereas *Derfflinger* was in commission on the 29th August, but, as you say, she will knock out the German when we meet.

Marshall Field and his bride are in U.S.A. A letter addressed Mrs. Marshall Field Jun^r (as there are two), Cadlands, Southampton, will be forwarded. I only met her once, when I took her into dinner. She is certainly a *glorious creature*. I fell down and worshipped on the spot and never seen her since. Sailor's luck: he meets a Divine Creature and then spends two years on the sea thinking of her.

I was thankful to read in the last paragraph of your letter that you are ruining all fools. In peace time we suffer them too long. But if they fail under the test of war they must go under. I sympathize with you in your task of correcting the mistakes of others, mistakes which were apparent to most sailors afloat — but thank God *you* can put them right. And I assure you I am happier now than I have been for months. I fire every day .303 aiming rifle from every ship and we are not going back in efficiency.

Yours ever,

David Beatty

¹ St. Abb's Head is at 54° 54' N. lat., near Berwick, Scotland.

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61: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
December 5th, 1914

My dear Lord Fisher,

Thank you so much for giving me news of my wife in yours of the 2nd. I know Madden will be glad to hear you have seen Mrs. Madden, as he is rather anxious about her, though I believe she is now on the mend.

Truly the 1st Lord is a marvel of energy by his trip to Flanders. I imagine that there is no information as to anything on the 8th. I feel much inclined to send out only one Battle Squadron and Beatty, so that I can get on with refits of the remainder. You had second sight, as whilst I was writing to ask for the 'M' class, you were discussing with Tyrwhitt the destroyer situation. Well, I still hope to get another half flotilla. Perhaps you can take the 'Beagles' [destroyers] from the Mediterranean for southern work and give me the 'M's'. Coal [-burning] boats would be a nuisance up here, whereas they are all right for Channel work. I fear our destroyers will be worked off their legs, but I fully realize that there is a great deal to do down there. The naval officers (if there were any) who selected and fitted out the 4 boarding steamers I have sent away ought really to be shot. They must have been absolute *idiots*. The captains all tell me of things they asked for which were obviously essential, but which they could not get.

I think we shall find that the German dummy dreadnoughts are fast. If ours were 16-knot ships, I would make great use of them. Of course I will use them somehow, but their slow speed makes it really murder to send them any distance away, and for that reason they are poor decoys. But I have not seen them yet, so will say no more. The *Tiger* dummies may be much better, if faster.

It should be easier to catch the German submarines down south than up here, as they have no places to shelter in the Channel. Here they have a hundred bays. A shore watch is of course useful, but they (the patrols) can't see at night, which is their time, and there are not enough trawlers to occupy a third of the bays in the Shetlands. I am asking for more. We shall, I hope, get the submarines in time, but as you know they have an immense underwater radius of action, far greater than our boats, and it gives them an enormous advantage. Your submarine paper when President of the Oil Fuel Commission

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must be interesting reading now.¹ It has all come true, even to the sinking of merchant ships, in which no one believed at all. I remember Prince Louis saying it was unthinkable. I hope we are building every TBD that the country can produce. They are *the* great antidote. All SM officers, our own and the German, dread them. Even *U-18* said so.

The Holm Sound² submarine opened our eyes. I did not believe one would face the sea there was there that day. Our own TBDs had reported they could not remain there. For this reason I have wired asking for materials with which to block the entrance. I think it really necessary, though I am most reluctant to do it, as the TBDs used the entrance freely, and it saves a long way if a submarine is reported on the East Coast.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

...

62: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 6th, 1914

My dear Jellicoe,

I more than sympathize with you in your anxieties as to the German submarines, for the simple reason that they are a good deal worse with us in the South than with you! I think I told you that *U-21* never leaves Havre. We've tried every device to catch her, and you can realize the menace she is to troops going to Havre every night, and we have at the same time many more German submarines even down to the coast of Cornwall. It's too sad how in these last four years we have so miserably fallen backward in submarines. That utter fool Briggs stopped all work on submarines as Controller, and apparently Sturdee, in season and out of season, opposed all advance! I have his lectures at the War College!³ How they could have been permitted is beyond my mind! Ram one of our submarines, they go to the bottom. You can ram a German submarine continuously without effect! and their periscopes immeasur-

¹ Fisher's famous submarine paper of January 1914, predicting the U-boat attack on commerce, had been pooh-poohed by Churchill. See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 27.

² Holm Sound is one of the eastern approaches to Scapa Flow.

³ Sturdee, as Chief of the Admiralty War Staff, 1914-1915, had lectured at the War College. He had been sent down after Coronel as Commander-in-Chief in the South Atlantic and Pacific to hunt down von Spee.

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ably superior, and their system of water-tight compartments quite excellent. Even the Fiume submarines are infinitely superior to ours: one ship inside, another giving wonderful buoyancy and safety! It is all too sad for words, and NO ONE SHOT FOR IT! . . .

No one has yet been punished for sending that rudderless old hulk to sea that sank off Portland (en route to Cromarty, I believe), full of most valuable repairing machinery — only a petty officer in charge, a falling barometer, and nothing secured for sea! It's all terrible to my mind! Every day I find evidence of utter incapacity and no one shot! and people say, 'Don't make a change'!

Yours,

Fisher

...

63: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 7th, 1914

My dear Beatty,

I'm d—d sorry, but YOU'LL be d—d glad that the *Von der Tann* is quite likely to have escaped into the Atlantic on NOVEMBER 7. Our Minister at Monte Video declares he has heard of her truthfully! This comes of Winston saying in the House of Commons on November 5th that we had taken steps, etc. as to *Scharnhorst*, so they got wind of *Invincible* and *Inflexible*. Very odd if *Von der Tann* did go 5 days before P. R. [*Princess Royal*]! We have not heard of *Von der Tann* since November 5, whereas we have heard of all the rest of the German Battle Cruisers 1st Scouting Squadron. . . .

Winston says I am full of the four 'S's'! Now! Secret, Silent, Saturnine, Sinister. I overslept myself last night, so can't write more. Just off to see the King, who wants me urgently, he says. Probably Prince Albert has got a stomach-ache!

Yours till death,

F.

The latest German scare from our Minister at The Hague is that 150,000 Germans will land, half at Dundee, the other half at Oban, and the feint of 20,000 men at Norwich 4 days sooner! This is to be on Christmas Day, when we are all supposed to be drunk.

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P.S.¹ I think the likely days for the Germans to come out will be December 8 and Christmas Day. December 8, because of the waning moon and dawning tide being favourable for a flying raid say at day-break, at Hull for instance, or for an 'insult' bombardment of the great steel works at Middlesboro' on which our existence depends. Christmas Day because of the Germans thinking of our taking it easy at that season. Neither you or Jellicoe can be in on the job — you can't get there in the time, nor indeed to cut them off with their rear well strewn with mines and covered by submarines, as it will be a flying escapade, I expect, on the part of the Germans.

'L'homme propose mais Dieu dispose.'

64: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 9th, 1914

My dear Jellicoe,

The days get more busy with me! I'm fighting to get the British Army on the sea flank. It's so obvious, yet it's not done. Our coast bombardments are futile now, as no military advantage taken of them! 10,000 British soldiers at Zeebrugge after the bombardment would have turned the German flank.² *All admit this!* but the Belgians and French don't care a d—n! All they do is to take a day off when we bombard! I am hoping to succeed. A long Cabinet discussion yesterday and a big telegram in consequence to Joffre.³ If so, then there is big work ahead of us and the nine 'Majestics' will be in the forefront of the battle on the coast!

Burney has not a single cruiser with him now. Would you propose to leave him thus? If not, what cruisers would you give him?
R.S.V.P.

Yours in haste,

F.

I hope to write more to-morrow. '*The policy*' is not to wear out our fighting vessels in ceaseless steaming before 'the day'!

¹ Clearly, although found attached to this letter, this postscript goes with an earlier letter.

² The 6th Battle Squadron had inaugurated the new offensive policy against the U-boat bases by bombarding Zeebrugge on November 23rd.

³ General (afterwards Marshal) Joseph J. C. Joffre, Commander-in-Chief of the French armies, 1911-1916.

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65: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL¹

December 10th, 1914

We cannot but be overjoyed at the *Monmouth* and *Good Hope* being avenged! But let us be self-restrained — *not too exultant!* — *till we know details!* *Perhaps their guns never reached us!* (We had so few casualties!) We know THEIR gunnery was excellent! Their THIRD salvo murdered Cradock! So it may have been like shooting pheasants: the pheasants not shooting back! Not too much glory for us, only great satisfaction. Not a battle for a Poet Laureate! *Let us wait and hear before we crow!* Then again, it may be a wonder why the cruisers escaped — if they have escaped — I hope not, for we had such a preponderating force — such numbers!² (*How the Glasgow must have enjoyed it!*)³ Anyhow, don't let us encourage ourselves in too many joy messages till we know more.

66: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

December 10th, 1914

My dear,

This was your show and your luck.

I should only have sent one greyhound [i.e. battle cruiser] and *Defence*. This would have done the trick.

But it was a niggling coup. Your *flair* was quite true. Let us have some more victories together and confound all our foes abroad — and (don't forget) — at home.

I am not quite happy about Zeebrugge and have held back the letter till to-morrow. I am shy of landings under fire — unless there is no other way.

Yours ever,

W.

¹ Most of the letters to and from Churchill with salutation or/and close missing are from *The World Crisis*, Vols. I and II.

² As it turned out, the German light cruiser *Dresden* had escaped. This led Fisher to question Sturdee's dispositions after the battle and to propose that he stay in the South Atlantic until the *Dresden* had been disposed of. Churchill's veto led to strained relations between the two for a while. (See *ibid.*, I, 452-3.) Sturdee returned to home waters and assumed command of the 4th Battle Squadron, 1915-1918. See Letter No. 99.

³ The light cruiser *Glasgow* had miraculously escaped destruction at Coronel.

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67: FROM LIEUTENANT-COLONEL M. P. A. HANKEY¹

Committee of Imperial Defence
2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.
December 10th, 1914

My dear Lord Fisher,
Congratulations on your triple triumph:

A personal triumph.

A triumph of correct strategical principle.

A triumph for your type of ship.

Don't reply.

Yours ever,

M. P. A. Hankey

68: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 11th, 1914

Dear Beatty,

Your kind telegram much appreciated. Sturdee's mob asked to put off sailing from Devonport till *Friday*, November 13. (IMAGINE being such d—d fools as to sail on a Friday and on a 13th!) The answer went 'SAIL WEDNESDAY', and we added a postscript they might embark the Dockyard if they liked. AND THEY LEFT! They only reached von Spee TO THE VERY MINUTE! 'Hustle' is a *good* word! Things done in a hurry are always done the best! Nelson said the whole secret of success in war was being there one quarter of an hour before the other chap! That was as nearly as possible Sturdee on von Spee, but perhaps it was **10** minutes!

Yours till death,

F.

... I've staked my billet on getting the British Army on the sea flank next week with the British Fleet bombarding. If so, we ought to be in Antwerp in 10 days and recover all the Belgian coast to the Dutch frontier! I expect you'll be out to Lat. 56, but you'll get orders. All this is only my private determination at present — so all I write is purely fantastic. At least it is thought so! Anyhow, don't write to the *Daily Mail*!

¹ Afterwards Colonel the first Baron Hankey; Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 1912-1938.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

69: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 11th, 1914

My beloved Jellicoe,

Alas! I am still pessimistic about the Russians, but no use talking about it! So I press with all my might to get the British Army on the sea flank and recover Antwerp and all the Belgian coast up to the Dutch frontier. I hope it will come off next week. You may be in it, I should think, if the German Fleet are ever going to intervene! But you'll get a telegram if you are to move to Lat. 56.

The Germans have an inexhaustible supply of mines! 400 just laid down at Zeebrugge. *Over a thousand* were laid down (Lord knows where!) by the *Berlin* somewhere in the Atlantic—Azores, amongst other places, and probably Black Sod Bay,¹ etc. Apparently not one single mine was ordered in the four years since I left Admiralty. Those delivered were balance of those I had arranged to have. Every single day there's some fearful exasperating fact like this that transpires! Amongst other criminal follies, they removed the net defence! I'm quite beat by this appalling folly. They sold many hundreds of magnificent troop boats at Haslar! It's really piteous! But what I complain of is that no one is punished! only promoted! However, they will get it all right at the Day of Judgment, but it's such a long time to wait for one's revenge! . . .

Yours for evermore,

F.

...

70: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT²

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 12th, 1914

Dear Corbett,

It was NOT luck! Come and hear the story! You'll love it! Bring your wife to lunch on Monday. No one else here. Ask me about the sodden fools who have brought back 6-inch secondary armament! and this 'crowning mercy' of the All-Big-Gun over von Spee!

Heaven be with you!

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Black Sod Bay was an excellent fleet shelter on the west coast of Ireland.

² Corbett was employed in the newly organized Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence in preparing the official naval history of the war.

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 17th, 1914

Secret and Private

My beloved Jellicoe,

The great thing is not to be downhearted! Had you heard the Prime Minister last night (at our secret War Council) talking of Beatty missing the German battle cruisers yesterday,¹ you would have thought England's last hour had arrived! It was bad luck for us to be so very close indeed to all the German ships, and in such immense superiority, and for the thick weather to save them from us *in the very jaws of death!* They only had 3 battle cruisers and 5 other smaller cruisers out. We picked up all their names *and so are quite certain of it!* I will send their names to you to-morrow. I have not got them by me now except, very roughly, *Seydlitz, Von der Tann, Von Roon*, and six cruisers of 'Stralsund' and 'Hamburg' type, and very few destroyers. *Von Roon* had 5 with her, and we are not sure there were any others. *At 12.45 the German Squadron was ours!* But alas! it was not guessed they would turn due north. Had it been a clear day, then both Warrender² and Beatty would have seen them — *they were close to!* But the same thing exactly happened to Nelson in the West Indies, and he also did not take the right turn! (*misled by a General's signal from the shore!*), and so he lost the French Fleet! His letter is a classic! It does me good even now!

Loch Ewe is all right for the Coastal Squadron. I suppose they will be submarined there in due course! I think I told you that Percy Scott is working out their programme. He is doing wonders with gunnery fittings. He walks about now saying nothing else but 'The German Squadron opened fire at 12,000 yards.' 'The German 4-inch guns made hits at 14,000 yards.' I believe it is quite true. The Gunnery Lieutenant of the *Sydney* says so about the *Emden* 4-inch, and Sturdee about the German 8-inch hitting us at 12,000 yards.

As to your having the Fleet out at Christmas, you are absolutely unfettered as to all your movements at all times.

We cannot transport nightly our reinforcements to France without

¹ A German squadron that included four battle cruisers had raided the Yorkshire coast on December 16th, bombarding Scarborough, Hartlepool, and Whitby.

² Vice-Admiral Sir George Warrender, seventh Baronet, commanding the 2nd Battle Squadron, 1912-1915.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

the Mediterranean destroyers. *All the others have been worn out! and absolutely useless now in bad weather!* and the French are quite effete in every naval requisite — no use whatever and *quite unreliable!*

Yours,

F.

72: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
December 18th, 1914

Personal and Secret

Dear Lord Fisher,

. . . I am writing . . . without a full knowledge, as yet, of the facts concerning the operations of the 16th. All that I have to go upon is the condensed telegraphic report of the Vice-Admiral, Second Battle Squadron [Warrender] and of the Commodore, Light Cruiser Squadron.¹ . . . The following is, I believe, a correct narrative of the operations.

I received the Admiralty telegram at about 12.30 a.m. on the 15th, and the Second Battle Squadron, Battle-Cruiser Squadron, Light Cruiser Squadron, and Third Cruiser Squadron left their various bases before daylight for the rendezvous of which I informed the Admiralty. I selected this rendezvous because it appeared to me to be the best strategical position to cover the East coast as far north as St. Abb's Head, and to offer the best opportunity for cutting off any enemy's force returning to Heligoland either via Terschelling Light-vessel, or from a position near St. Abb's Head. As events turned out, it would seem that this position was the best that could have been selected. When I chose it I had in mind the gap which was shown on the Admiralty mining chart between the two German minefields. It seemed probable that the Germans might make use of this gap, which would probably be known to them.

I felt that the force which I was sending was lamentably weak in destroyers. It was impossible to send any of the destroyers from Scapa, the sea was far too heavy in this vicinity for them to have kept up the necessary speed.

¹ Commodore (afterwards Admiral Sir) William E. Goodenough, commanding the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron, 1913-1915 (to the 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron in February 1915).

On the chance of the sea being less in the Moray Firth, I ordered all the available destroyers to sea from Cromarty; the total number, however, was only seven, and this was all that the Vice-Admiral had at his disposal.

For this reason, I submitted to the Admiralty with some emphasis that the Commodore T. [Tyrwhitt] should be directed to meet the Vice-Admiral at his 7.30 a.m. rendezvous with the First and Third Flotillas. This telegram, however, was not answered.

The narrative of events shows that the 7 destroyers with the Vice-Admiral became engaged with the enemy's destroyers at 6.15 a.m. It is very fortunate that the enemy's destroyers did not strike our Battle Squadron instead of our destroyers. The reasons why this engagement was not reported and the west patrols warned require explanation.

This is important.

have just seen Warren-der for a moment and this mistake in coding did not have much effect.

The enemy did come out through that gap. Warren-der or Beatty should have got further in but I think Dogger Bank got in the way of Beatty.

The next event was the receipt of the Admiralty message, No. 703, stating that at 18.20, Scarborough was being shelled. It is most unfortunate that this telegram should have been incorrectly coded at the Admiralty. It did not deceive me; I at once imagined that it was a coding error, and that it was intended to read 08.20. But it did deceive the Vice-Admiral, who thereupon turned to the eastward, apparently with the idea that the enemy had probably already retired towards Heligoland, and the result was that he arrived at a position some 30 miles east of the 7.30 rendezvous. The later telegrams showed him that the bombardment was actually taking place, and he turned to the northward. On receipt of his telegram informing me that he had turned to the northward, I at once telegraphed to him pointing out where there was a gap between the enemy's minefields, and indicating to him that it was probable that the enemy would attempt to come out through this gap. The Vice-Admiral then turned his force to the westward, and at 12.15, when to the southward of the Dogger Bank and opposite the gap in the minefield, sighted enemy's light cruisers and destroyers going to the eastward.

At that time, the Vice-Admiral Commanding, First Battle Cruiser Squadron [Beatty], was to the northward of the Dogger Bank, and to the northward and westward of the Battle Squadron.

It appears to be fairly evident that the vessels sighted by the Vice-Admiral, Second Battle Squadron, formed the cruiser and destroyer screen of the enemy's battle cruisers. The screen, on sighting the battle squadron, turned to the northward, and the Vice-Admiral, First Battle Cruiser Squadron, on receiving the information from the

Vice-Admiral, Second Battle Squadron, turned to the south-eastward to intercept them. The result appears to have been that the enemy's light vessels passed ahead of the Vice-Admiral, First Battle Cruiser Squadron, without being seen by him, and that the enemy's battle cruisers passed astern of him, again without being seen. Had the weather been clear, there is no doubt whatever that both the light cruisers and the battle cruisers would have been seen and engaged by our force. As it was, they all escaped.

There was such luck.

It appears that earlier in the forenoon our own Light Cruiser Squadron sighted and chased some of the enemy's light cruisers and destroyers. The reason why this chase was abandoned is not yet quite clear.

This requires explanation.

So far as my present knowledge goes, the salient points of the whole operations appear to be as follows:

1. The thick weather was largely responsible for the escape of the enemy. The *Kent* was in the best possible position for intercepting the enemy had it been clear.
2. An equally salient feature, and one which I think contributed largely to the escape of the enemy, was the absence of a sufficient force of destroyers with our vessels. Had the Commodore T. been at the 7.30 a.m. rendezvous, it appears to me almost certain that a very large number of the enemy's destroyers would have been engaged, and there would have been a considerable probability of our destroyers gaining touch with his heavy vessels.
3. There was an absence of a directing head. The Commodore T. had not apparently been placed in communication with the Vice-Admiral, Second Battle Squadron, and it does not appear from the narrative that the Vice-Admiral took any steps to order him to co-operate, presumably because he had no authority to do so.
4. Some time was lost due to the error in coding the Admiralty message referred to earlier in this letter.
5. A great deal of time was occupied in getting through to the Vice-Admiral the Admiralty messages giving the positions of German battle cruisers — the first message took one hour, and the second took two hours, both being received too late to be acted upon. Possibly this delay was entirely unavoidable.

I find Warriner expected to meet Commodore T. at 7.30 a.m. R. [rendezvous]

Not important.

I fear that our destroyers suffered somewhat heavily, and my

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

already small number is being yet further reduced. It is not surprising that they should have suffered when the odds of 33 to 7 are considered; I think it is very fortunate that we did not lose some destroyers entirely.

I cannot emphasize too strongly the view which I hold of the absolute necessity of any force of large vessels carrying out operations against the Germans being accompanied by a strong destroyer contingent, as the Germans never move heavy ships without a very adequate supply of those essential vessels. . . .

There are some points which still require explanation regarding Wednesday's operations, and when I have full information, I will write an official dispatch. It would not be right for me to express any decided opinion on the manner in which the operations were conducted till I have a full knowledge of the facts.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

P.S. I have seen Warrender for a moment and added marginal notes to my letter. I am sending *his* report by the messenger. I am *intensely* unhappy about the escape of their vessels. We had the opportunity of our lives. The thick weather was the principal cause. *But* the coast should have been warned when the 6.15 destroyer engagement took place. This business requires explanation.

73: TO MRS. R. W. LOVETT

December 20th, 1914

My dear Mrs. Lovett,

I suppose we were not humble after sinking all those German ships at the Falkland Islands, so Providence came along and gave us a nasty knock in allowing the German Bombardiers of women and children at Scarborough and Whitby to escape when they were all actually in our grasp! But Heaven sent down a thick mist, like the cloudy pillar of the Israelites, and they dashed off at right angles at 30 knots speed and we never saw them [any] more! Such is life! . . .

The United States Government allowed Japan to have submarines built in the United States when Japan was fighting Russia, but Mr. Bryan and President Wilson won't allow England the same advan-

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tage.¹ And Colonel Goethals, in charge of the Panama Canal, finds the Canal blocked when English ships want to go through, he being a German through and through! but don't say anything. The time will come when the United States will be d—d sorry they were neutral. There's a lovely poem by William Watson which has had a circulation of millions on American neutrality.² I must get a copy and send you. I don't complain. We shall win all right. I am only *VERY sorry*.

I'm too busy to write more. I really am.

Yours,

F.

74: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 20th, 1914

Secret and Private

Please burn at once.

My beloved Jellicoe,

I find much difficulty in snatching even a few moments in which to write to you. Winston has so monopolized all initiative in the Admiralty and fires off such a multitude of purely departmental memos (*his power of work is absolutely amazing!*) that my colleagues are no longer '*superintending Lords*', but only '*the First Lord's Registry*'! I told Winston this yesterday and he did not like it at all, but *it is true!* and the consequence is that the Sea Lords are atrophied and their departments run really by the Private Office, and I find it a

¹ A telegram of December 8th from Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, the British Ambassador at Washington (1913-1918), began: 'Submarines. Secretary of State [William Jennings Bryan] told me that he found it necessary to make public statement in view of possible excitement in Congress. I ascertained on enquiry that Schwab's agent had been warned about a fortnight before that while legal precedents allowed export of finished parts the Administration might take a different view. As a matter of fact President declared that export of finished parts was contrary to spirit of the Alabama decision. . . .' Fisher noted in the margin (December 9th): 'He that is not with us is against us! We ought to speak out! We are a poor lot!' Churchill added this minute (December 9th): 'Let us see what Schwab has to say.' All worked out fine, however. Schwab was able to proceed and delivered the first batch of submarines in five months, whereas submarines had never been built before in less than fourteen months. 'And not only that, but they were of so efficient a type ("H" Class) that they came from America to the Dardanelles without escort, and were of inestimable service out there, and passed into the Sea of Marmora, and were most effective in sinking Turkish Transports bringing munitions to Gallipoli' (*Records*, p. 187).

² William (afterwards Sir William) Watson's poem, 'To America Concerning England', chiding England's 'daughter and her mightiest heritress' for her neutrality.

Herculean task to get back to the right procedure, and quite possibly I may have to clear out, and I've warned Winston of this. But please do not mention this to a soul. I only want to explain to you that I have so little time to write to you.

The distribution of weak, slow ships [pre-dreadnoughts] all over the world is disastrous — for instance, the *Vengeance*, hardly able to steam and sent to St. Vincent; the *Canopus*, in the last throes, in the South Atlantic; the *Goliath*, unseaworthy, in the Indian Ocean; the *Albion*, *Ocean*, and others all worked out. Old cruisers even more disastrously distributed, and these meant to catch 'Dresdens'! *It's too laughable!* and yet Sturdee considered a great brain man! and he alone did it all! for Battenberg was a cypher and Winston's facile dupe!

The Germans' next raid with *Derfflinger*, *Von der Tann*, *Seydlitz*, *Moltke*, and *Blücher* (they are all named to us beforehand by German officers in their cups!) will be Folkestone and Portsmouth and then on to coast of Ireland, and home via north of Iceland *à la Rio Negro*,¹ of whose voyage the Germans are exceeding jubilant, from Para via Boston to Kiel! It seems to me that Beatty's ships ought to come down to Rosyth or the Humber, or how on earth can he catch *Derfflinger* & Co.! We can moor 8 battle cruisers inside completed boom at Humber, so they tell me.

Yours always,

Fisher

75: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 20th, 1914

Private

My dear Jellicoe,

I've just read your admirable letter on the German fiasco on November [December] 16th. *It's quite excellent!* I fear I am more savage than you are! At one moment Beatty was within 20 minutes of the German battle cruisers! How unkind was the Heavenly mist! and Goodenough a fool, and Warrender (with 19 ships in all) covering so little space when he ought to have spread like a fan! The moral is that there is not enough cruiser exercise, and that Beatty

¹ The German steamship *Rio Negro* had served as a tender to the *Karlsruhe*.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

should have those 4 fast cruisers now attached to him *as an integral part of his Squadron, never to leave him!*

Sturdee's criminal ineptitude in not sending a vessel to Punta Arenas [Chile] at the close of the action on December 8 to cable result to Admiralty and to get information from the British Consul there (who held the cable!) has disastrously kept from you light cruisers now hunting *Dresden*, which ship was forced to Punta Arenas for coal on December 11, as she was empty.

Yours,

F.

76: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
[ca. December 21st, 1914]

My dear Jellicoe,

I agree with you as to Goodenough and the 16th, but I go further and think that all concerned made a mighty hash of it. The Admiralty by their telegram put them in the exact spot to swallow the plum, just as we did for Sturdee and as in this case almost to the minute! ['No, I did, as I gave them the position to which to go.' — J. R. J.] Sturdee wanted to delay his departure from Plymouth and had he done so, the Germans would have swallowed the *Canopus* and gone to South Africa and swallowed King-Hall¹ also! Similarly with the 16th. The two big forces were only 20 minutes apart, really, at maximum speed! The Germans' escape miraculous! Also our following them through the German mine gap equally wonderful! But no use crying over spilt milk. Had I only stuck to my own opinion and brought you out, instead of only Warrender [rest of letter missing].

¹ Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Herbert G. King-Hall, Commander-in-Chief of the Cape Station, 1912-1915.

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77: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
[ca. December 21st, 1914]

SECRET

Please burn at once.

My dear Jellicoe,

... There is of course immense and universal disappointment at the Germans being missed by Warrender, Beatty, and Goodenough. I confess when we intercepted signal that we had sighted the German cruisers and English and German flagships only 28 miles apart at 12.30, steaming direct for each other, I did really think our 'Day' had come! Apparently the *Derfflinger* was also out, but the Admiral was in *Seydlitz*. A. K. Wilson says that very few Admirals from his experience have 'the mooring board mind'! They steer for where the enemy is, not to where he will be! I thought the new College, now so many years educating everyone, had corrected all this! It will be very interesting to see the track charts of the English and German Squadrons, especially where the German Admiral turned due north and Warrender was then revolving on his own axis. Beatty we can't locate, except that he seemed at 20 minutes East Longitude, between the German Admiral and the land. *We can't possibly have a better chance of catching them, nor ever again such early information of their movements.*

The correspondent who predicted this raid writes yesterday that next time they [will] come to Folkestone, instead of Scarborough, and will wake up Hedworth Lambton at Portsmouth!¹ Of course this is pure guessing, but certainly they will soon come again, and I know no alternative but to organize a Battle Cruiser Squadron as soon as we can at the Humber, where the submarine-proof defence is nearing completion, because Beatty can't possibly get down in time from Cromarty and nothing less fast is of any use (for even Warrender was helpless, though only so few miles off), except by intercepting the Germans on way back. The weather so thick apparently that the German cruisers, to be seen (as they were seen), must have been very close! However, Nelson had the same bitter disappointment!

I am gradually getting to comprehend the senseless use of all types of our vessels since the War began! Sturdee seems alone to blame.

¹ Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet) the Hon. Sir Hedworth Meux (formerly Lambton), Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, 1912-1916.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

Battenberg never seemed to interfere, and the First Lord, of course, quite ignorant of sea work! I just give you one example of criminal folly in the escorting of the multitude of contraband vessels by our destroyers day in and day out, with the result that our patrol destroyers are simply utterly worn out and battered to pieces in the unceasing gales in the Channel and on the East Coast — all of which could have been avoided by placing a small armed guard in each contraband ship to shoot the captain if necessary. This now done and the destroyers relieved of all such duty, but alas! the mischief is done and from Plymouth to St. Abb's Head the destroyers are next to useless!

Similarly the submarines kept perpetually fooling outside! What for? When wanted they couldn't be communicated with! No doubt, Providence has us specially in care, or how could we have escaped so far? So, really, we are at our wits' end down south for destroyers and efficient submarines — only 9 submarines now that can be counted upon! Sturdee the one and only man responsible for all this. Probably he will be made a lord! . . .

Last night we got an illuminating account of *U-16* from Esjbergh — that Danish frontier port in Schleswig-Holstein (I never can spell it!). They were supplied by the Danes with 15 tons of oil, though their own harbour of Sylt only a few miles away! They had been on Norwegian Coast all the War and never yet been back home, and got all their supplies in Norway of every kind. The Captain and crew are all Danes. Our informant, who is an expert official, went to visit her on duty, so learnt every detail about her. . . .

Burney,¹ who was out in the North Sea at gunnery practice with all his Battle Squadron, promptly scuttled into Sheerness Harbour the instant he heard of the Germans being out! The moment the Germans sighted Warrender's six ships, it was reported to Schilling Roads and the German Fleet came out to the Amrum Light² at once, which is why we sent to you to come out instantly, and did hope that Warrender would have headed off the German battle cruisers to the northward, but apparently he failed to see that he could intercept them by steering to the eastward. However, no use crying over spilt milk. We must have battle cruisers down south more under control.

Yours,

F.

¹ Burney had just taken over the command of the 1st Battle Squadron of the Grand Fleet (Second-in-Command under Jellicoe), 1914-1916.

² Amrum Light, on the coast of Schleswig-Holstein.

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 21st, 1914

Dear Winston,

I fear you have missed my point about the 32-knot 'Rhadamanthus'¹ (*So quickly built and cheap!*) The only vessel that can 'catch', not 'keep up with' — *she has to catch!!!!* — the German battle cruiser *Lützow*, of 28 knots, is the English *Tiger*, of 29 knots. (She can't be counted on for 30, I'm told!) *Anyhow, a few months out of dock (even a few more tons of coal) makes a superiority into an inferiority of speed in the list you gave me!* There's no 'commanding personality' in that list! ONE 'Greyhound' amongst that lot of hares with the characteristics of the 'Rhadamanthus' would knock them all out! The big 5 knots of the 'Rhadamanthus' is wanted 'here and now' (as the Salvation Army poster says!). *We have got to have 3 'Rhadamanthi'!* and we have got to get rid of our multitude of 'Canopi' ET HOC GENUS OMNE! Scrap them all! *The scrapheap cries aloud!* A multitude of splendid seamen butchered in ships that can neither fight or run away!

Behold the 'Western Patrol' if the *Derfflinger* gets through at the end of this week to Ireland and Iceland! *Look at the murdered Pegasus!*² All over the world we distributed Tortoises to catch Hares. *Bring them home and put them in the Zoological Gardens as specimens!*

Those minelayers of ours will be butchered if they go out. Send the mines in the 'L' class of destroyers — *they are all fitted to lay mines!* *The whole 'L' class to be ALWAYS OUT SINGLY, INDEPENDENTLY distributing bouquets of mines at the Amrum Light and far out to sea!* LOCK the Germans up! DO SOMETHING!!!! *We are waiting to be kicked!!!* Next kick this week!

Yours,

F.

N.B. The *Derfflinger* being docked now to get every ounce of her speed!!! *Kindly return me this letter.* IT'S EPOCHICAL [*sic*]!

¹ The 'Rhadamanthus' was the projected battle cruiser type (for three of the five battle cruisers included in the building programme of November 3rd). It would 'immortalize' the Director of Naval Construction, Sir Eustace Tennyson-d'Eyncourt, Fisher predicted. The specifications included: speed, 32 knots; six 15-inch guns; twenty (in one letter he speaks of twenty-five) 4-inch automatic guns, all on the top deck; all oil. Though Churchill objected to them (see the following letter), two of them (*Repulse*, *Renown*) were approved soon afterwards (though with seventeen 4-inch guns) and laid down in January.

² The light cruiser *Pegasus* had been sunk by the light cruiser *Königsberg* on September 20th off Zanzibar.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

79: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 21st, 1914

My dear Fisher,

I see no objection to laying one or two minefields out from Heligoland to-night, or to laying some shield or barrier lines off weak points on our own coast. I expect we shall suffer inconvenience from it afterwards, but there is always a chance of a bag. It is like having a few lottery tickets. But it is no substitute for going to work. A policy of scattering a few bouquets of mines from destroyers, and building fast ships that will not be ready until all is over, is only a partial solution of our problem. I am entirely opposed to the laying down of new dreadnought ships at this stage. It will hamper more urgent work in every direction. Long before they can be finished we shall have smashed up the German Navy in harbour with our monitors, or they will have fought their battle in blue water, or peace will have been signed. I could never undertake to attempt to persuade the Cabinet to such a measure, after the immense programmes of monitors and submarines, etc. I have asked them for on the opposite policy — viz. everything that can be finished in 1915, and nothing that can't. You will have to beat and destroy them with what you've got in 1915, and God knows there is enough — if handled.

The key to the naval situation is an oversea base, taken by force and held by force, from which our C submarines and heavily gunned destroyers can blockade the Bight night and day; and around which and for which a series of desperate fights would take place by sea and land, to the utter ruin of the enemy.

But I cannot find anyone to make such a plan alive and dominant, and till then our situation is, as I have told you and as you justly say, that of waiting to be kicked, and wondering when and where. As long, however, as our Intelligence do their job this is a pretty good game.

Keyes is a brilliant officer, with more knowledge of and feeling for *war* than almost any naval officer I have met. I think the work and efficiency of our submarines are wonderful.

I agree with you about scrapping some of the worthless old ships.

...

It looks as if they were coming to the Christmas party — trust so.

Yours always,

W.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

80: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 22nd, 1914

My dear Jellicoe,

. . . Your letter about the raid was quite excellent and very clear. '*Battle cruisers and more battle cruisers*' is the watchword! I expect Beatty quite by himself would have scored a victory. That way lies the path to glory. Cumbersome battleships are rotten. Slow men and slow ships mean failure. I suppose we've got to have our South Africa, only we have not got three years to muddle through. You tell me weather absolutely precluded your destroyers going out with Warrender. Similarly, Tyrwhitt had to send back the First and Third Flotillas, and he himself, doing his utmost, came down in *Arethusa* [light cruiser] from 30 to 15 knots! A battle cruiser would have gobbled him up that day when he started. His destroyers were forced to put back much knocked about.

There are many indications of the Germans repeating the dose on a more extended scale,¹ but before you get this letter it will probably be all over!

I've just had to make a *casus belli* about wireless stations and think I have them! Half a million sterling for five more big wireless stations, to be very quickly done. It's exasperating that they were not fitted before the War.

No time for more.

Yours,

F.

¹ One of the 'indications' was contained in a 'VERY SECRET' memorandum of December 19th, circulated among A. K. Wilson, Oliver, and Bartolomé: 'Last night an Italian officer (on whom I think I can rely) came to see me just straight back from Berlin. He is on terms of great intimacy with German officers in high places at Berlin, but he himself is exceedingly pro-English. . . . Last Sunday at Berlin he heard his German friends in their conversation talk of this Scarborough raid and of the intention of repeating these raids at short intervals, as they feel assured of success because of the *extreme celerity* of the operation and the *extreme brevity* of it. Also they lay mines plentifully on each occasion and hope our ships may be thus blown up in chasing or in finding them in the first place. When circumstances favour them, they intend to land some troops. They have a plan for an attack on the Irish coast, because so quite unexpected by us, and they have Irish supporters, so they say. The German idea is that these raids will greatly demoralize us and cause us to risk our ships and to divide them up, and will also make the transport of our new armies to the Continent less comfortable for us. . . .'

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915
81: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 22nd, 1914

Burn

My dear Fisher,

I am wholly with you about the Baltic. But you must close up this side first. You must take an island and block them in, *à la* Wilson; or you must break the [Kiel] Canal or the locks, or you must cripple their Fleet in a general action. No scattering of mines will be any substitute for these alternatives.

The Baltic is the only theatre in which naval action can appreciably shorten the war. Denmark must come in, and the Russians be let loose on Berlin.

There are 4 good Russian Dreadnoughts.

Yours ever,

W.

82: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 23rd, 1914

My dear Jellicoe,

Apparently no move by the Germans, as expected from various movements, but they are very 'slim' [tricky]! The military deadlock seems complete on both frontiers. Accordingly, till next March the Germans can play about with some 500,000 men anywhere they like! It's not till March that the Russians can recover.

I am now alone here fighting the battle for more battle cruisers! I wish, when you have leisure, you would write me a casual sort of letter which I can show to the Cabinet (*not as if you were responding to my request; not an official memorandum*) that the supposed existing superiority in fast battleships that we now have is FALLACIOUS! more especially in quoting 'Queen Elizabeths' as they do. *None of our existing ships have the necessary FUTURE speed!* The new German *Lützow* battle cruiser, with possibly 14-inch guns, or even 16-inch, will have certainly *over 28 knots speed!* We must have **32** knots speed to give us a margin of being long out of dock, and to give the necessary excess of speed to CATCH a 28-knot ship! *Millions of SLOW*

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

ships are no use! SPEED IS EVERYTHING! We can get in 15 months *even now* a 32-knot battle cruiser with 6 (six) 15-inch guns, with 20° elevation instead of 15° as at present, and oil enough to go round the world at 15 knots without refuelling. I've seen all the contractors and made all the arrangements to lay her down on January 18 or January 25 (*my birthday!*), but I'm the only one in favour of it! (so probably I shall call the cab on January 25!) She has 35-feet freeboard forward (no weather will stop her!), four guns firing ahead, six on each broadside — to 75° before and abaft the beam — and two guns dead aft. She has 20 new-type, long 4-inch *automatic* guns with 30° elevation, instead of 15 as at present, with an effective hitting range of 14,000 yards. (*The Emden with her 4-inch guns hit the Sydney every time at 14,000 yards!*) These 4-inch guns have shoulder pieces (automatic firing) mounted high up on central line of ship. NO GUNS BETWEEN DECKS WHATEVER! Two torpedo tubes in deference to your opinion. *I consider them d—d rot!* It would save me an immensity of trouble if you would kindly send this letter on to Beatty, as being the Admiral commanding the Battle Cruiser Squadron, if he also could support me with a private letter *written in a casual way!* I have to resort to every stratagem to gain my mind! If I don't get these 3 battle cruisers of 32 knots speed, I shall have to leave the Admiralty on January 25 next.

Yours till death,

F.

PRIVATE. By March we shall have 8 monitors with four 14-inch guns each, with 6-inch armour, and drawing only 9 feet of water. This is the 'Styx' class.

N.B. KEEP ALL THIS PRIVATE ABOUT THE 'RHADAMANTHUS' AND THE 'STYX'!

The 20 of the 'Rhadamanthus' 4-inch guns will *not* be manned in close action. They will be used at extreme ranges — no shields or armour. They will be used against destroyers by night and against periscopes by day. It's a new invention of central pivoting and firing with a shoulder piece like the 12 pdr. used to be, and *absolutely automatic loading* (fed from below decks).

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

83: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 23rd, 1914

Secret

My dear Fisher,

. . . I don't think that officers should be got rid of for a single failure,¹ unless there are other reasons for thinking they are incompetent. Men often learn by mistakes, and the anxieties of war are such that leaders must know that they will be supported, and not be worrying about their own positions and feeling themselves in personal jeopardy. . . .

As for Keyes, I think he has done very well, and never failed us in any way. All these three years I have watched his work with increasing confidence. Merit, zeal and courage must not be easily overthrown by bad luck. The Germans have missed many more shots [opportunities] than we have. And we have very few chances, and targets. . . .

Yours very sincerely,

Winston S. Churchill

84: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
December 23rd, 1914

My dear Lord Fisher,

Messenger just arrived with yours of 20th and 21st. I *cannot* believe the Germans will run into the Channel. *If* they do, surely our submarines and clouds of T.B.D.'s *must* get them.

I hardly know whether to go out for my firing west of Orkneys or not, as you seem so certain of a raid to-morrow. I am wiring at any rate to say what I propose doing, so that if you have any information you can stop me and tell me to go into North Sea instead.

I fear this perpetual idea of raids will affect our strategy. I fully realize it is most difficult to resist the feeling that we must be there to catch them, but, honestly, I don't see how it is to be done. Manœuvres have shown

¹ Fisher had apparently recommended the sacking of Warrender, Keyes, and Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Sackville H. Carden, commanding the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron, 1914-1915.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

time after time that you can't do it. Even if the raiders are only battleships; when they are battle cruisers, it is still more hopeless. If I get into the North Sea for three or four days, *the raid may come just as I get back to coal*. I realize the difficulty of the problem fully, and wish I could see a way out of it.

Rosyth and Humber are not ideal places for large ships like the battle cruisers. It's not at all easy to get out on an ebb tide. *I doubt if feasible at night at times*.

Things don't seem going well ashore. We'll hope the New Year will give us some better luck.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

...

85: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 25th, 1914

Reasons for laying down a Fast Battle Cruiser of 32 knots speed on January 25, 1915 (to be followed by two others later on).

It is entirely a question of speed. As Sir John Jellicoe says in his letter of yesterday, '*Speed is life*'! and he entreats us to build more battle cruisers. The 'Queen Elizabeths' are magnificent ships, but their speed is only 25 knots. Our fastest ship is the battle cruiser *Tiger*. She cannot exceed 29 knots. The German battle cruiser *Lützow*, now completing, aims at that speed also. But we don't want equality of speed; we must have excess of speed, a large excess of speed to catch the enemy. The greyhound is *much* faster than the hare! Ever so much faster! We have nothing to 'catch' the German *Lützow*. *We must have something!* Six months out of dock, even at our *average* moment, would find the *Lützow* at her 'selected' moment outpacing the *Tiger*. That's why we want a big excess of speed! So 32 knots is asked for and *we can have it!* It is promised to us in a ship to be built in a little over a year. Mr. Laing, the most eminent of living marine engineers, undertakes to provide the propelling machinery desired for 32 knots. The vessel will have a radius of action of 12,000 miles. This is immense! Her six 15-inch guns with 20° elevation, and her 25 4-inch guns of special type with 30° elevation, will

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

range over 26,000 yards and 14,000 yards, respectively. All her guns are very high up and will be effective in a hurricane. The 4-inch guns will not be manned in close action. They have immense velocity and automatic loading and [are] aimed with a shoulder piece. No destroyer or periscope will [escape] these 25 quick shooters of such accuracy of aim! The German *Emden* hit the English *Sydney* with her 4-inch guns at 14,000 yards. The 6-inch guns of the English *Kent* [cruiser] were outranged by the German 4-inch guns at the Falklands action. The freeboard of this 32-knot battle cruiser is no less than 35 feet forward, an unexampled height, with corresponding power over heavy seas. Nothing will escape her. See the label on the model!

F.

[Attached covering note]

Keep this private at present, as I have two very important additions, BESIDES your paper about stopping and altering 'Royal Sovereigns', the most retrograde design I ever saw! SLOW, COAL, and 6-INCH GUNS BETWEEN DECKS!¹

86: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

December 26th, 1914

Dear Jellicoe,

I am in entire accord with you as to bearing in mind ALWAYS *the big thing of the War!* which is to keep our Big Fleet in big preponderance, intact and ever ready to cope with the German Big Fleet! *In my decided opinion your Fleet and no big ship of your Fleet should EVER be in the North Sea.* NEVER. I have said so constantly since I came and I think I must now make a formal written statement. I have written it informally, over and over again. Of course, if the German Fleet come out, you come out! The answer is: 'Don't interfere with Jellicoe!' My reply is: If the Admiralty had issued such an order, the

¹ The five 'Royal Sovereigns', of the 1913-1914 building programme (completed in 1916), had reverted to the coal of the pre-'Queen Elizabeth' (1912-1913 programme) dreadnoughts and were four knots slower (21 as against 25). Before he left office Fisher had arranged for their conversion to oil fuel. A note to Churchill the same day reads: 'From everywhere comes the cry: "More battle cruisers, 32-knotters, the "Onslaught" type!"' Churchill appended this minute the same day: 'If the Navy and the Admiralty can't beat the Germans in 1915 with 15 fast, heavy ships to 5, the former should be shot and the latter sacked.'

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

Hawke could not have been lost, with her irreplaceable mass of invaluable officers and men.¹ No more would the *Cressy*, the *Hogue*, and the *Aboukir*! *More men lost than by Lord Nelson in all his battles put together!* Immense numbers of officers and men of inestimable value, sacrificed for what? Work that armed trawlers, supervised by *armed wireless yachts of suitable dimensions*, could do far better! Big yachts! For myself, I'm dead against your now being in the North Sea with your whole Fleet. I have said so over and over again, but the *mot d'ordre* is 'Trust Jellicoe, don't fetter him!' and it's somewhat hard for me to go against that cry, *but now I must!* and to-day I shall put in a formal written dissent for Board record! As A. K. Wilson truly says, in wartime we can't go resigning! but I've been near it once or twice! Of course you are right over and over again about our imperative need of more battle cruisers. The 'Royal Sovereign' type is the most retrograde design that human eyes ever looked upon! SLOW, COAL, AND LOW SIX-INCH GUNS BETWEEN DECKS! Terrible! and no battle cruisers even thought of! SPEED, SPEED, SPEED, but that d—d fool Custance has wrecked us!² It's awful what fools we've been, and led by fools!

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. Please kindly return me this letter. *I want to put it in my reminiscences!* as on reading it over I much like it!

87: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 26th, 1914

With the valuable *Achilles* [cruiser] patrolling the North Sea (what for?) — with the *Birmingham* [light cruiser] reporting a periscope last evening in the same latitude (who is she supposed to be looking for?) — with the *Antrim* [light cruiser] missed by a torpedo by only a few yards in the same place — with the *Hawke* sent to the bottom off Peterhead, together with an immense number of irreplaceable invaluable officers and men — with the holocaust of the three cruisers losing more officers and men than in all Lord Nelson's

¹ The cruiser *Hawke*, in the 10th Cruiser Squadron, was torpedoed by U-9 on October 15th, with the loss of nearly 500 lives.

² Admiral (ret.) Sir Reginald Custance. See *Fear God and Dread Naught*, II, 225, n. 2. 452.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

battles put together — with these incidents in mind and the totally inadequate reasons presented for these big ships being in the North Sea, it seems imperative to refix in our minds the one pervading governing condition of the present war at sea, which is to keep a big preponderance of sea force ever ready to cope with the Big German Fleet at its 'SELECTED' moment and our 'AVERAGE' moment (to use classic words!).

To this end an Admiralty order is necessary for our big ships not to fool about the North Sea doing work infinitely better done by armed trawlers properly supervised by big armed wireless yachts commanded by the élite of our officers and not with the 'leavings'!

It is my decided opinion no big ship of the Fighting Fleet should go into the North Sea! WHEN the German Big Fleet comes out, THEN our Big Fleet will come out! WHEN the German battle cruisers come out, THEN our battle cruisers will also come out, and they will not be suitably placed till they are at the Humber on the completion there of the interminable submarine-proof anchorage.

Fisher

88: TO REAR-ADMIRAL FREDERICK C. T. TUDOR¹

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 27th, 1914

Third Sea Lord,

It is desired to substitute two fast battle cruisers for the *Renown* and *Repulse*, which vessels are hardly begun. (One per cent of one, I think, and but little more on the other!) The utmost secrecy as to this change should be observed so as to give us a good lead over the Germans, as was the case with our first battle cruisers of the 'Indomitable' type. In their case we got 18 months start at least before their design and armament were suspected. We must refrain from putting on paper any details, because best left for discussion. The First Lord is quite glad to substitute two such vessels BURNING OIL ONLY for the two coal-burning ships they replace. In this connection it is to be mentioned that a vast development has just taken place in Egypt (and another region) in oil production, and without exaggeration it may be said that millions of tons of oil are now at our disposal, so any remaining dread of giving up coal as fuel now entirely disappears. We have information that the coaling of our battle cruisers

¹ Afterwards Admiral Sir Frederick Tudor; Third Sea Lord and Controller, 1914-1917.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

and the supply of coal to the fires very seriously affects their fighting efficiency. This defect or drawback will disappear in the new 'Renown' class and will also reduce the personnel very materially. The central point in the rapid completion of these two vessels will be the provision of the propelling machinery. It is believed this can be installed in 15 months. The D.N.O. will find no difficulty as regards the provision of the armament to meet this date. It is hoped the two ships may be begun on January 15 (as much of the material provided already will no doubt be capable of being worked in!). An essential feature besides the simplicity of the armament will be the comparative light draught of these two new ships, not exceeding 26 feet, but it is hoped maybe less, as compared with probably 32 feet in 'Queen Elizabeth' type. A meeting with the builders of the *Renown* and *Repulse* at noon on Tuesday, December 29, will probably result in a satisfactory issue, enabling us to confide in the completion of these two ships for service in 15 months' time. . . .

F.

Postscript. Not an ounce of weight beyond present fixed conditions as given on model must be permitted, as it is VITALLY IMPERATIVE for STRATEGIC REASONS to keep the *deep draught* UNDER 26 FEET! Only a small load of 4-inch ammunition need be carried — NOT the full allowance per gun. You don't want the same proportion for 25 guns as for, say, 5 guns! This is obvious! Similar reductions in useless stores now carried *must be drastic*. We want to be *profuse* in oil for radius of action and in ammunition for the 15-inch guns, and NIGGARDLY *in all else*. E.g., two anchors ample. The ship will *never* be without steam, and so on through all the outfit of the ships, and eliminate weighty fittings — marble tiles and so forth weighing tons! . . . (We'll call them 'Renown' type. 'They'll win renown'!) The D.N.O. must hustle, and we must freely 'commandeer' from all vessels building. *If they are not built in 15 months, they are useless! We MUST have them by April 15, 1916!* We must 'scrap' everyone who gets in the way, if you will kindly let me have their names.

Yours,

Fisher

As proposed by I.S.L., but I wish to see an alternative worked out embodying exactly the same principles but carrying 8 primary guns instead of 6.

W. C.
28.12

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

89: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
December 28th, 1914

My beloved Jellicoe,

It gave me immense comfort to read your telegram that you were safely back in your Zareba!!! I HOPE TO GOODNESS YOU'LL STOP THERE! Also I hope you'll stop these insane cruises of your big ships in the North Sea, or we shall have the *Cressy*, *Aboukir*, *Hogue*, *Hawke*, *Hermes*¹ all over again, and the Admiralty will deservedly be kicked out of office for allowing such utter murder by prowling German submarines, who are not going to be kept off by these Chinese methods of frightening them with a big ship! Only armed trawlers, supported by big armed wireless yachts, should be in the North Sea. Captain Webb² stoutly maintains, and every one agrees with him, that the continuance of British fishing in the North Sea, which I wished to utterly prohibit, is an immense safety to us, as we get invaluable information and warning from these fishermen. What's your opinion? *R.S.V.P.*

The busy Bayly³ wants to attack Borkum to-morrow!!! He certainly is full of ginger and a welcome change to the dismal Burney!

Two days ago two very immense discoveries of oil — one in Egypt and one elsewhere — giving us literally without exaggeration MILLIONS of tons of oil per annum, so that anxiety is quite past, and one can only deeply regret the 'Royal Sovereign' class burning coal. The coaling of the battle cruisers is hell! and so is their supply of coal to the fires!

Yours,

F.

¹ The seaplane carrier *Hermes* had been torpedoed off Calais on October 31st by *U-27*.

² Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Richard Webb, Director of the Trade Division, Admiralty War Staff, 1914-1917.

³ Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir Lewis Bayly, Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet, in succession to Burney, December 1914-January 1915.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

90: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

December 29th, 1914

Secret. Burn.

My faithful Pamela!

I've been terribly negligent of you and your dear Reggie! But I've been 'sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before me'! and time after time prevented me whizzing down in motor to Smith Square to see you both! Never mind, my dear! We'll meet in Paradise, and we'll have a good long time together there! so cheer up!

Are you downhearted?

NO!!!

I can't well write of all that has been happening, but various crises, so the pool has not been stagnating! and Jacky is gradually coming in for his own! I sometimes wonder if I did well in coming, but I hustled the *Invincible* and the *Inflexible* to the Falklands when the 'oi polloi' were retarding, and so they got there, one may say, to the minute! I'm keeping the memorable telegram to the Admiral at Devonport that sent them flying off in red-hot haste and supposed unreadiness! Isn't it a wonderful truth that '*what is done in a hurry is always done best*'! The bloom is on the peach!

My fondest love all round you.

I LOVE YOU!!!

Yours,

F.

91: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
[late December 1914?]

Please burn.

Dear Jellicoe,

. . . I still adhere to my belief that when the hard frost comes, with a period of stillness suitable for the Zeppelins, they will all come over in the dark hours and massacre London, and there is nothing whatever to prevent it, and at the same time their Fleet will dash for Folkestone, do a massacre there, and then bombard Portsmouth *en passant*, gobble up Wemyss's and the French squadron in mouth of

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

Channel, do a diversion in Ireland, mop up de Chair,¹ pass to the north of Iceland to the territorial waters of Norway and Denmark, and so home to the Elbe. In the meanwhile, fast cruisers and fast armed merchant cruisers will have escaped into the Atlantic from the Elbe and Kiel via Iceland, with prearranged colliers for them by the very wonderful organizer the Germans have in the United States. *He's a marvel!* We yesterday got an extraordinary account of his achievements in coaling German cruisers. *Quite a marvel!* He is now coaling the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* on the Equator from Pernambuco!

Yours,

F.

P.S. Tell me what you would *automatically* do, as the Admiralty buildings would be razed to the ground, *so no orders at all!*

92: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

January 3rd, 1915

Private and Personal

Dear Winston,

I've been informed by Hankey that the War Council assembles next Thursday [Friday, January 7th] and I suppose it will be like a game of ninepins! Everyone will have a plan and one ninepin in falling will knock over its neighbour!

I CONSIDER THE ATTACK ON TURKEY HOLDS THE FIELD! But ONLY if it's IMMEDIATE. However, it won't be! Our Aulic Council² will adjourn till the following Thursday fortnight! (N.B. When did we meet last and what came of it???)

We shall decide on a futile bombardment of the Dardanelles, which wears out the irreplaceable guns of the *Indefatigable*, which probably will require replacement. What good resulted from the last bombardment? Did it move a single Turk from the Caucasus? And so the War goes on! You want ONE man!

¹ Rear-Admiral Rosslyn E. Wemyss (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet the first Baron Wester Wemyss), commanding the 12th Cruiser Squadron (Western Patrol), 1914-1915; Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Dudley R. S. de Chair, commanding the 10th Cruiser Squadron (Northern Patrol), 1914-1916.

² The Aulic Council was the supreme tribunal of the Holy Roman Empire (1501-1806), from which there was no appeal.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

This is the Turkey plan:—

I. Appoint Sir W. Robertson, the present Quartermaster-General,¹ to command the Expeditionary Force.

II. Immediately replace all Indian and 75,000 seasoned troops from Sir John French's Command² with Territorials, etc., from England (as you yourself suggested), and embark this Turkish Expeditionary force ostensibly for protection of Egypt! WITH ALL POSSIBLE DISPATCH at *Marseilles*! And land them at Besika Bay direct, with previous feints before they arrive with troops now in Egypt against Haifa and Alexandretta, the latter to be a REAL occupation because of its inestimable value as regards the oil fields of the Garden of Eden, with which by rail it is in direct communication, and we shove out the Germans now established at Alexandretta with an immense Turkish concession — the last act of that arch-enemy of England, Marschall von Bieberstein.

III. The Greeks to go for Gallipoli at the same time as we go for Besika, and the Bulgarians for Constantinople, and the Russians, the Servians, and Roumanians for Austria (*all this you said yourself!*).

IV. Sturdee forces the Dardanelles at the same time with 'Majestic' class and 'Canopus' class! God bless him!

But as the Great Napoleon said, 'CELERITY' — without it, 'FAILURE'.

In the history of the world — a Junta has never won!

You want *one* man.

Yours,

F.

93: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 4th, 1915

Please burn.

Strictly Private and Confidential and PERSONAL

Dear Mr. Balfour,

I'm told by Esher (who appears to have been making historical researches in his leisure hours with General Joffre, with whom he

¹ General (afterwards Field-Marshal, first Baronet) Sir William Robertson, Quartermaster-General, 1914-1915.

² Field-Marshal Sir John French (afterwards first Earl of Ypres), Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Forces in France, 1914-1915.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

now lives) that a '*Junta*' to direct a war is damnable! I RATHER THINK IT IS! We have a War Council and we are going to meet next Thursday [January 7th], and our proceedings remind me of a game of ninepins! One ninepin in falling knocks over its neighbour, and so on! Plans *ad infinitum*! (and I'll back my Winston against the field!) We also have a '*Junta*' at the Admiralty! and I've been within an ace of leaving it, but this is absolutely between ourselves. Like Lord John Russell,¹ Winston feels competent to command the Channel Fleet! and certainly he has amazing courage! But I've had a big explosion yesterday and possibly things may be better, but it's difficult for the leopard to change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin! And I really don't contemplate a long stay where I am! (*As I said before, this is absolutely personal to yourself!*)

There have been shocking *naval* disasters, AND ALL WERE AVOIDABLE, and the prestige of the Navy rudely knocked! Not an Admiral shot! and when some day I give you the inner history of our one bright spot, off the Falklands, you will, I think, agree with me!

But all this is not the purpose of my letter, which really was solely begun to urge on you the peculiar merit of Hankey's Turkey Plan. *I do hope you will give it all your support.* But it is vital that Sir William Robertson, now Quartermaster-General in France, should command it, and that this Turkish Expeditionary Force *should embark at Marseilles (ostensibly for defence of Egypt)*, and that it should consist of AT LEAST 100,000 seasoned troops from Sir John French's Army, to be replaced by Territorials from England now ready. I wish to remind you of what the great Napoleon said was the one vital essential in war — CELERITY. It was solely Celerity that sent the German Squadron to the bottom at the Falklands! Anything done in a great hurry is ALWAYS done the best! 'The bloom is on the peach!' So please carry this plan next Thursday, or tell them you'll resign from the War Council, and I will humbly follow you!

I have said over and over again, and now say it direct to you, that you really are the ONE man to direct the War. As it is, I don't find anywhere the courage of a louse or the backbone of a slug!

Yours truly,

Fisher

¹ As Leader of the House of Commons, Lord John (afterwards first Earl) Russell had much to do with the aggressive use of the Fleet in the diplomacy that preceded the Crimean War (1853-1854).

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

94: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 4th, 1915

PLEASE BURN.

My dear Jellicoe,

... We have a War Council next Thursday presided over by Prime Minister and attended by Mr. Balfour, when some vital decisions ought to be taken, but they won't! Vacillation is the order of the day and procrastination is the idol of the politicians. 'Something may turn up'!

In the meantime, the one great naval policy is to conserve our ships and not recklessly send them out as food for German submarines! Personally, in your place, not one single vessel of my Fleet should ever go outside Scapa Flow! Not one, not even a little one! But I don't wish to fetter your discretion, but as sure as fate you'll lose another 'Audacious' if you do send your ships out!¹ Tirpitz is going to mine more and more and submarine more and more. We can't touch their submarines. We know that two of them have gone 19 knots on the surface and they carry a 13 pr., so can fire at our submarines and kill them, and our best destroyers were beaten back by the 'Formidable' gale in which the German submarine kept company with our ships, and at 1.30 a.m. she torpedoed the *Formidable* running on the surface.²

Yours,

F.

Work up your trawlers and yachts is my advice, and put more Fleet Officers in them as necessary!

¹ The dreadnought *Audacious* (2nd Battle Squadron) had sunk off the north coast of Ireland on October 27th after striking a mine.

² The pre-dreadnought *Formidable* (Channel Fleet) had been torpedoed in the western end of the English Channel on December 31st. The Admiralty put Bayly on half-pay (January) for his neglect of ordinary precautions against submarine attack.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

95: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

January 4th, 1915

Secret

My dear Fisher,

We must be agreed on certain points:

(1) No landing at Zeebrugge except as one in a general British advance and at the desire of Sir J. French.

(2) Failing any British advance along the coast, only do Sir A. Wilson's bombardment and blocking the canal business. But do this on the 14th.

(3) If the Army cannot or will not advance along the coast, there is no use in sending more reinforcements to France.

(4) Borkum is the key to all Northern possibilities, whether defensive against raid or invasion, or offensive to block the enemy in, or to invade either Oldenburg or Schleswig-Holstein.

(5) Ask that a regular division of infantry be assigned to the capture of Borkum, and that plans be made on that basis for action at the earliest moment.

(6) Meanwhile, we could take all the rest we can for our heavy ships and flotillas, keep them in harbour and get ready for the offensive.

(7) I think we had better hear what others have to say about the Turkish places before taking a decided line. I would not grudge 100,000 men, because of the great political effects in the Balkan peninsula: but Germany is the foe, and it is bad war to seek cheaper victories and easier antagonists. This is, however, a very general question.

(8) With regard to mining, you should put forward definite and practical proposals.

Yours ever,

Winston S. Churchill

96: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

January 4th, 1915

First Lord.

In reply to your memorandum herewith of this date, it seems necessary to lay down in the first place what the British Naval Policy is.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

(a) In the first place, that policy is to conserve our naval superiority over the Germans and in no wise jeopardize it by minor operations whose cumulative effect is to wear out our vessels and incur losses in ships and men. We can't afford any more losses or any further deterioration except for absolutely imperative operations.

(b) No landing expedition on the North Sea coast can be entertained during the winter months, which, however, should be utilized in preparing for such expeditions in the spring.

(c) If there is not going to be any military advance along the coast, I see no advantage in what would be a futile loss of some of our bombarding vessels, because it is now an expected event instead of being a pure surprise as was the case on the previous occasion.

(d) I agree that Borkum offers great possibilities, but it's a purely military question whether it can be held.

(e) Your remarks I absolutely concur in '*to take all the rest we can for our heavy ships and FLOTILLAS, keep them in harbour and get ready for the offensive*'.

(f) Herewith is the mining statement. These opinions I have held since the War began.

(g) I also attach the Baltic paper.

(h) The naval advantages of the possession of Constantinople and the getting of wheat from the Black Sea are so overwhelming that I consider Colonel Hankey's plan for Turkish operations vital and imperative and very pressing.

(i) I think such feats as the recent air attack on Cuxhaven¹ most necessary and consider an attack should be made on January 10th, which I understand is feasible.

I think this deals with all your remarks.

F.

[Attached paper]

MINE-LAYING

The German policy of laying mines has resulted in denying our access to their harbours; has hampered our submarines in their attempts to penetrate into German waters; and we have lost the latest type of Dreadnought (*Audacious*) and many other war vessels and over 70 merchant vessels of various sizes.

As we have only laid a patch of mines off Ostend (whose position

¹ The Zeppelin sheds at Cuxhaven had been raided by nine seaplanes on Christmas Day. '... it was hoped that the enterprise might provoke a fleet action, and the whole of the Grand Fleet was concentrated in the middle of the North Sea' (Julian S. Corbett: *History of the Great War. Naval Operations* [5 vols., London, 1920-1931], II, 51).

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

we have notified), the Germans have free access to our coasts to lay fresh mines and to carry out raids and bombardments.

We have had, to our own immense disadvantage in holding up our coastwise traffic, to extinguish the navigation lights on our East Coast, so as to impede German ships laying mines. At times we have had completely to stop our traffic on the East Coast because of German mines; and the risk is so great that freights in some cases have advanced 75 per cent — quite apart from shortness of tonnage.

The Germans have laid mines off the North of Ireland and may further hamper movements of shipping in the Atlantic.

The German mine-laying policy has so hindered the movements of the British Fleet, by necessitating wide detours, that to deal with a raid such as the recent Hartlepool affair involves enormous risks, while at the same time the German Fleet can navigate to our coast with the utmost speed and the utmost confidence. They know that we have laid no mines, and the position of course of their own mines is accurately charted by them — indeed we know this as a fact. Our Fleet, on the contrary, has to confine its movements to deep water, or slowly to grope its way behind mine-sweeping vessels.

There is no option but to adopt an offensive mine-laying policy.

It is unfortunate, however, that we have only 4,900 mines at present available. On February 1st (together with 1,000 mines from Russia) we shall have 9,110, and on March 1st we shall have 11,100 mines. This number, however, is quite inadequate, but every effort is being made to get more. Also FAST minelayers are being procured, as the present ones are very slow and their coal supply very small. So at present we can only go very slow in mine-laying; but carefully selected positions can be proceeded with.

We must certainly look forward to a big extension of German mine-laying in the Bristol Channel and English Channel and elsewhere, in view of Admiral Tirpitz's recent statements in regard to attacking our commerce.

Neutral vessels now pick up pilots at the German island of Sylt and take goods unimpeded to German ports — ostensibly carrying cotton, but more probably copper, etc., and thus circumventing our economic pressure. This would be at once stopped effectually by a mine-laying policy. Nor could any German vessels get out to sea at speed as at present; they would have to go slow, preceded by mine-sweeping vessels, and so would be exposed to attack by our submarines.

F.

4.1.15

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 4th, 1915

First Lord.

On December 26 the Admiralty had reliable information of a Zeppelin attack on London on the largest scale, with both naval and military German Zeppelins.

This is January 4, and the Public are not aware of what is impending, nor any step taken as regards reprisals in notifying German Government. There are at least 20 Zeppelins available for this attack on London, and each Zeppelin can carry a ton of explosive. It is asserted by the experts that one ton of explosive would completely wreck the whole of the Admiralty buildings. This is quoted merely to indicate the terrible massacre resulting from the dropping of these 20 tons of explosive anywhere in the London area.

There is no defence except reprisals to be officially announced beforehand to the German Government. As this step has not been taken, I must with great reluctance ask to be relieved in my present official position as First Sea Lord, because the Admiralty under present arrangements will be responsible for the massacre coming suddenly upon, and unprepared for by, the Public.

I have allowed a week to elapse, much against my judgment, before taking this step, to avoid embarrassing the Government. I cannot delay any longer.¹ F.

¹ Churchill has written: 'He believed that a catastrophe was impending and that he would be held partly responsible. He proposed to me that we should take a large number of hostages from the German population in our hands and should declare our intention of executing one of them for every civilian killed by bombs from aircraft. I, on the other hand, felt sympathy for these helpless people . . . and had from the very beginning of the war urged publicly a merciful attitude towards them. Shooting them in droves or threatening to do so would not make the slightest difference to the German action, and would only stain our reputation. I was therefore offended to receive from Lord Fisher [this] official minute' (*The World Crisis*, II, 63, and see Churchill's reply of January 4th, *ibid.*, II, 64). The dénouement, in Fisher's words, follows: 'I withdrew my resignation at the request of Authority, because Authority said that the War Office and not the Admiralty were responsible and would be held responsible. The aircraft belonged to the War Office; why on earth couldn't I mind my own business? I didn't want the Admiralty building and our wireless on the roof of it to be bombed; so it *was* my business (the War Office was as safe as a church, the Germans would never bomb that establishment!)' (*Memories*, pp. 124-5). But the date given in *Memories* for the proffered resignation is 'somewhere about January 15th', and in his 1916-1917 correspondence Fisher several times states that he had resigned *after the War Council of January 7th*. On that occasion, he had, according to a copy of the proceedings, 'said that the Admiralty had reliable information that an attack would soon be made, first by the German Naval Zeppelins on some East Coast town, and subsequently a combined attack by Naval and Military Airships on London. . . . The decision of the War Council was: 'No further action can be taken at present.' It would appear, then, that Fisher had offered his resignation *twice* over the alleged 'air apathy' in the country: on January 4th and shortly after the January 7th War Council.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

98: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 5th, 1915

Dear Jellicoe,

Bayly has not yet sent us a word, but a Lieutenant saved from the *Formidable* was at Admiralty yesterday and told us the ships were in single line ahead, two cables apart, 10 knots, with two light cruisers *astern*, bright moon, and steaming on the same course exactly both there and back from the Start Light, which is the one light the German submarines always make for [in] their run up Channel. Bayly was ordered to Portland, so why he was not in there I don't know. He sent back the destroyers told off to escort him to Portland. Where are we to get Admirals from? And how is it the *Jean Bart* does not sink,¹ and the *Audacious* and others do from one single explosion?

The Zeppelins turned back, as a gale came on. Apparently *Rostock* [light cruiser] & Co. only went to examine a supposed British minefield! We are so hard up for destroyers and light cruisers in the South that we have had to postpone a most important air expedition which had been fixed for next Sunday. Everything has been worn out! The new 'M' class are ever getting shattered in these gales looking for German submarines. It's very striking that the weather forced our destroyers back into harbour when the German submarine on the surface at 2 a.m. was torpedoing the *Formidable*!

We are going to suffer terribly for the four years' apathy about submarines at Admiralty, from 1910 to 1914. We got a reliable report yesterday that the Germans have more submarines than shown in their official list on outbreak of war, and 50 more completing. The Army having failed us in getting along the coast as promised, we are now faced by the great development of Zeebrugge, both as a submarine and a mining base, and to bombard it is only a temporary setback to them and attended now by great risk.

Yours,

F.

¹ The new French dreadnought *Jean Bart* had been torpedoed by an Austrian submarine in the Adriatic (December 25th), but had managed to reach port despite heavy damage.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

99: TO ACTING VICE-ADMIRAL HENRY F. OLIVER AND
WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 6th, 1915

C.O.S.

First Lord.

It is pressing to send following telegram to Admiral Bayly, 'Remain at your present anchorage at Portland pending further orders,' for the reason that his letter indicates no sense on his part of the dangers of submarine attack and of necessary precautions, and unless this telegram is sent we may have another calamity put upon us by a pig-headed officer, for it must have been patent to every officer and man in his squadron that to steam at slow speed in close order on a moonlight night on a steady course in the vicinity of the Start Light was to make his Squadron an easy target to the hostile submarines which all the precautions taken by the Admiralty to escort his Squadron from Sheerness must have convinced him was a very present danger. There's not a word in his letter exculpating himself or to indicate that he won't do it again, hence this telegram should be sent to him, pending the further action on his report of the disaster.

F.

A . . . Another matter. I think the First Lord's suggestion should be immediately acted upon by cable to Captain Millward (our Consul at Punta Arenas) to spend any money required to obtain copies of the telegrams sent by *Dresden* to Berlin or elsewhere during her 31 hours stay at Punta Arenas. After talking to Captain Webb it appears to me that our Minister in Chili was exceedingly remiss in not taking more active steps than he did in regard to *Dresden* and her stay beyond the 24 hours, obviously waiting for replies to her telegrams. If the *Dresden* gets to the Bay of Bengal by means of arranged colliers with Berlin, we shall owe a lot to Admiral Sturdee!

A has been done.

H. F. Oliver
6.1.15

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

100: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 6th, 1915

PRIVATE

BURN.

Dear Beatty,

... What I am planning is for *Queen Elizabeth*, *Inflexible*, *Invincible* and *Indomitable* being your second division, to be stationed at Rosyth. Tell me minutely which you prefer and don't mention your writing to me to anyone at all — I will tell Jellicoe myself that I am writing to you. Remember you have ever so much greater chances of acting from Rosyth than from Cromarty! I think Rosyth the most damnable spot on earth myself and stopped it for 5 years, nevertheless it is there now and we have to use it! I myself wanted to concentrate 20 millions sterling on the Humber to dig it out and make a second Portland of it. *It's THE vital spot!* But of course at present it is quite unusable and unsafe, and a weird anchorage owing to excessive tides, all which could have been got over by digging out a new river and big breakwaters, but we've always been misled by d—d fools and built no submarines for 4 years, and have got fewer mines in stock and fewer submarines than when I left the Admiralty 4 years ago!

Yours,

F.

P.S. I agree with you. It's impossible to comment on December 16. The plum actually dropped into our mouths within a few minutes only of an immense victory. They realize it. Never again!

101: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 11th, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

... I expect you'd better write now and again to the First Lord or he'll be jealous!

You say golden words when you protest '*against taking risks for which there is no compensating advantage*'. What I wish you would

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

impress on the First Lord when you write to him (AND WHICH HE WON'T BELIEVE!) is that German submarines of the latest type, with their 3,000 miles radius of action and seaworthy qualities, *can face weather that our destroyers don't like! That's an absolute fact!* Also tell him that a 'mining' policy of the eastern end of the British Channel against submarines is obligatory. It's rot to talk of tide making it inadmissible! Look at the effective mining of the Dardanelles! *The Thames estuary channel the only passage to be allowed.* Reiteration is the secret of conviction! *You must keep on saying these things!* Every firm everywhere is building destroyers to the very utmost limit, and so also submarines. I got a fresh 'UTMOST' order given for both destroyers and submarines the day after I arrived, *October 31*, and sent for all the contractors to the Admiralty and made them a speech (*about 40 of them all told*), and appointed S. S. Hall¹ to do nothing else whatever except to travel from firm to firm watching their endeavours, and the moment one of them slacks down he reports and I send for him!

In great haste, Yours,

F.

102: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 12th, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

I think your mining letter of December 29 MOST EXCELLENT! and I have put this minute upon it: 'I am absolutely in accord with every word written by Sir John Jellicoe in his letter herewith of December 29.' But A. K. Wilson and Oliver and all the small fry have pulled your letter all to pieces with '*buts*' and '*objections*', of which no doubt the First Lord will take full advantage, as he is dead against a mining policy, and very largely so because of the utter neglect of all to do with it during the last three years, when it was known what immense efforts were being made by the Germans in this direction. *In everything we are confronted by some political expediency! and my patience is pretty near exhausted!* 'PROCRASTINATION', 'VACILLATION', 'INDECISION' are the watchwords of the War Council and all it directs! *I really*

¹ Captain (afterwards Admiral) Sydney S. Hall had been Inspecting Captain of Submarines, 1906-1910.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

don't think I can stand it! I presume either A. K. W. or Sturdee would be First Sea Lord. *I think either would be considered a master-stroke by the politicals!*

There is some 'movement' going on in the German High Sea Fleet — *nothing at all definite*, but nevertheless enough to arouse suspicion, and closely analogous to what took place on December 16. We have refrained from telegraphing to you, as all is so vague at present. The mines we laid down off the Amrum Bank have caused the Germans great anxiety, and they recalled *U-8* submarine urgently and she is back at Heligoland, and this so illustrates how mines embarrass submarines, let alone our own experience of German mines by our submarines in the Heligoland Bight.

The rearrangement of Admirals and cruiser squadrons is again in the melting pot!!! I told you of the kaleidoscope!

I think it's excellent how you so quickly and efficiently get to sea as you do! IT'S VERY REASSURING!

SECRET. Sir John French comes to-day to London, and to-morrow the War Council is to decide whether the British Army is to come on the sea flank and take Zeebrugge. THIS IS AWFULLY SECRET! I will let you know, of course, what happens.¹

Always yours,

F.

103: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
January 17th, 1915

Secret

My dear Lord Fisher,

... It is astonishing how quickly our supposed superiority in dreadnoughts and Battle Fleets vanishes. To-day I have 19 battle-ships (dreadnoughts) plus 7 'King Edwards' to meet 16 German

¹ At the War Council on January 13th Fisher demurred to any attempt to attack Zeebrugge without the co-operation of the British Army along the coast, as proposed by the Admiralty in November 1914. General French now concurred and pressed for a land drive against Zeebrugge with naval co-operation. With two Territorial divisions promised as reinforcements by mid-February, he believed he could advance to the Dutch frontier. The necessary preparations were approved, but a final decision was postponed until February. The Zeebrugge project was abandoned at the War Council of January 28th. 'Unless some pressing need arose, the Admiralty had come to the decision to confine operations to aerial attack until the heavy monitors which were under construction were ready' (Corbett: *Naval Operations*, II, 108).

dreadnoughts and 8 'Deutschlands' plus twelve 4th and 5th Squadrons, which is what would come out if they meant business. I hope these figures will be borne in mind, together with the fact that they would certainly turn up with at least eight flotillas — 88 torpedo boat destroyers to my 32.

I am wiring to ask when I may expect another flotilla. In view of the fact that I was promised at least four 'Galateas' [light cruisers] last September, I think I am not importunate in asking for a third flotilla, since I have not been given my 'Galateas' and one of my best Cruiser Squadrons (the First) is being taken away South.

I hope the First Cruiser Squadron will be *used* if and when it goes South, but I confess I don't see how it will be used, as the place is so full of mines and submarines.

I also do beg that one of the Battle Cruiser Squadrons (the First) may return to Cromarty when *Invincible* joins; or if not the First, then the Second. They will certainly get mined in at Rosyth if they all stay there.

Is it really necessary to send *Inflexible* to relieve *Indefatigable*? I should have thought that with *Goeben's* speed reduced and no port open to her in the Mediterranean, the French Fleet (which is pretty big) could have been detailed to look after her.

BATTLE CRUISERS ARE OUR LIFE BLOOD, and I do suggest most earnestly that 'Inflexibles' should return here at once. With two Battle Cruiser Squadrons we are really in a strong position. . . .

If you would only just compare the orders for the protection of the High Sea Fleet, as given in the O X O papers, with the arrangements here you would be horrified. *I wonder I can ever sleep at all.*

Thank goodness the Germans imagine we have proper defences. At least so I imagine — otherwise there would be no Grand Fleet left now. It really is a most serious question and I do hope you will approve of any proposals I put forward on this subject. . . .

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

104: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
January 18th, 1915

Secret

My dear Lord Fisher,

I am sorry to say that I fear very much that *Superb* [dreadnought] has a stripped turbine. We are still investigating, but I much fear it is the case.

I have wired suggesting 'Inflexibles' should return to England, as really our margin is too slight to ensure a real crushing defeat of the High Sea Fleet, and I cannot for the life of me see why the French can't look after a crock like the *Goeben* whilst *Indefatigable* refits. She could not get far even if she got out, and she would not get back again. With *Conqueror* [dreadnought] and *Superb* away for an indefinite time, and two other ships — one battleship and one battle cruiser — refitting (this is essential or we shall have more breakdowns), the margin is too thin when you take into consideration the immense superiority the Germans will certainly have in torpedo boat destroyers at Armageddon, and the losses I may suffer before and during this fight from mines and submarines.

I have gone into the question of complements for *Crescent*, etc. [10th Cruiser Squadron], coming here, and the proposals are absolutely inadequate and futile. I will write or telegraph officially directly I have got figures, but I am convinced that I cannot lie here with any safety unless those ships are properly manned and equipped.

If you would send for Captain Kedroff, Russian Navy, and hear his views on our defenceless condition here as compared with Russian procedure, it would open your eyes; and if you read the O X O papers showing German defences, it would show you what *they* think necessary. Captain Kedroff thinks us *mad* simply. If the Germans but knew the conditions, there would be no Grand Fleet to speak of, in a week.

It seems to be impossible to get the departments at the Admiralty to realize that this is a base and the most important one in the country: that the fleet here is enormous, and that the number of auxiliaries and ships is infinitely greater than at any other naval port — and yet it is expected to run this place with a staff, plant, etc., of infinitesimal dimensions as compared with, say, Plymouth, Portsmouth, etc. The result naturally is that I have to lend a hand with

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

my staff, and work accumulates on my shoulders, as I feel that the place is insecure. I trust my proposals, when they arrive, will be approved, as I really cannot take the responsibility for the safety of this Fleet without adequate staff and appliances. To place a Commander in charge of the whole organization at Hoxa¹ would be absolute madness. Colville can't do it, as he is six miles at least off and constantly his communications are cut. I have eased my mind on this subject and hope I have not wearied you, but I feel it very strongly.

I am very glad to hear there is a hope of the First Flotilla coming soon.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

105: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

January 18th, 1915

First Lord.

I have no wish whatever to cold-douche any projects for our being troublesome to the enemy in the following remarks.

When there's a good chance, by all means send an overwhelming force instanter to attack the enemy, even though done in a great hurry — yet hustle them off to the attack! We did so with *Invincible* and *Inflexible*. We did so in getting Warrender and Beatty out on December 16, and hustled them out in daylight, *pace* submarines and mines! One event came off and the other didn't, but *that wasn't our fault at Admiralty!* It nearly did not come off at the Falklands, *but that wouldn't have been our fault either!* I never read such dilatory and theatrical tactics — *à la* William Terriss!² And one result was the escape of the *Dresden*, quite apart from not sending *Inflexible* at once to Punta Arenas — but that is a digression. I only repeat, when a good chance offers to attack, it should be made instanter! But I desire to emphasize the necessity of sticking to the enemy's vitals! I am not minimizing the coming Dardanelles operation, but I wish to aggrandize the great big fact that 750,000 men landed in Holland, combined with intense activity of the British Fleet against, say,

¹ The boom defences across Hoxa Sound, Shetland Isles.

² William Terriss, the late nineteenth-century English actor, noted for his breezy style of acting.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

Cuxhaven, would finish the War by forcing out the German High Sea Fleet and getting in rear of the German Armies! The First Lord has twice put before the War Council the Dutch Project and no one 'gainsaid' it! Is it going to be done? Great preparations are involved. The frost so deadly to Holland is over in May. Cannot a definite decision be reached?

F.

106: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 19th, 1915

PLEASE BURN.

My dear Jellicoe,

I am so glad to hear you are going to take some leave, but Cromarty seems too near to your work to have rest! *The sooner you go, the better!*

It's amusing how Winston makes out that in all types you are ever so much stronger than when you assumed command of the Fleet. I simply keep on reiterating, '*He has only 29 battleships available at present.*' He can't get round that fact! So goes off on another attack on your arrangements: 'Why do you send so many away at once for repairs and refit?' Because you can't help it! Then the complaint is that you run the ships to death! that they never get rest! etc., etc. And now the Cabinet have decided on taking the Dardanelles solely with the Navy, using 15 battleships and 32 other vessels, and keeping out there three battle cruisers and a flotilla of destroyers — *all urgently required at the decisive theatre at home!* There is only one way out, and that is to resign! But you say '*no*', which simply means I am a consenting party to what I absolutely disapprove. *I don't agree with one single step taken*, so it is fearfully against the grain that I remain on in deference to your wishes. *The way the War is conducted both ashore and afloat is chaotic! We have a new plan every week! . . .*

Yours,

F.

January 20th, 1915

First Lord.

I should say, from reading Admiral Jellicoe's letters [Nos. 103, 104] received yesterday that he is not well, and is in consequence suffering from a temporary depression. But at the same time he has continually expressed these opinions for several weeks now, though not in such a despondent way, and therefore they must be taken to be his considered view. If by any means the Admiralty can meet his wishes, without prejudicing other requirements, it is obviously desirable for them to do so (even if not convinced of the absolute necessities of the case), because such a state of mind is infectious and may easily spread through the Grand Fleet.

In the attached paper I have briefly but carefully considered the relative strengths of the Grand Fleet and the whole probable German Fleet in Home waters, and I have given my opinion of the situation from the point of view of numbers only and without reference to strategical and tactical considerations. If these be taken into account, and assuming, as is I believe the case, that the Commander-in-Chief can always decline battle in the southern area of the North Sea, where the waters may be prepared beforehand by the enemy with mine and submarine, the position of the Grand Fleet is relatively improved.

With respect to battleships, battle cruisers, and cruisers I believe his strength to be sufficient.

With regard to light cruisers the position is not so good comparatively; but taking into account the total of cruisers and light cruisers the position will be more satisfactory so soon as the proposed augmentation of destroyer force is effected. Nevertheless, I think a third Light Cruiser Squadron with the Grand Fleet might well be

¹ Jellicoe had telegraphed the Admiralty on January 18th that the Grand Fleet, allowing for five dreadnoughts and battle cruisers absent for repairs or refitting, comprised 25 capital ships and 7 pre-dreadnoughts, as compared with 20 and 20, respectively, for Germany. 'The preponderance is very slight and more than counterbalanced by inferiority in number of destroyers and probable losses from mines and submarines. Submit for consideration the great desirability of bringing home both H.M.S. *Invincible* and H.M.S. *Inflexible* in order to maintain balance . . .' Churchill commented, in a memorandum to Fisher of January 19th, which prompted Fisher's letter of January 20th, that Jellicoe had '5 more Dreadnoughts, including four of the most powerful afloat, than he had at the outset'. He had 21 dreadnoughts and battle cruisers, with another ready to rejoin, for a total of 27 to a 'maximum German possible 21. On his line of battle his broadside is much more than double that of the enemy. . . . [other reinforcements are detailed] In these circumstances, his telegram attached is not worthy of him, and ought certainly not to affect our dispositions'.

formed. . . . Thus a new Light Cruiser Squadron could be quickly formed, *and this is a thing which the Commander-in-Chief particularly wishes*. The Commander-in-Chief should be told that pending a further increase of force at Harwich the 3rd Light Cruiser Squadron will be required from time to time to co-operate with Harwich Flotillas.

With regard to destroyers, the position is clearly shown in the paper, and at the moment the Commander-in-Chief is undoubtedly weak. The changes should be made at once.

This deals with all questions regarding the composition of the Grand Fleet — but various other points are raised in these letters.

The Commander-in-Chief advocates one Battle Cruiser Squadron being at Rosyth and the other at Cromarty — *Vice-Admiral Beatty wishes that they should be kept together! I agree with Admiral Beatty!* BUT! In view of all undoubted serious disadvantages of Rosyth, as personally experienced by Bartolomé in *Invincible*, I should let them all be at Cromarty and put Arbuthnot¹ at Rosyth or Humber. *It has now been approved for the 2nd Battle Cruiser Squadron to be under the orders of the Vice-Admiral of 1st Battle Cruiser, and it certainly seems desirable that they should work and act together, and be based as far forward as possible.* With regard to being mined in at Rosyth, the position will be no different there than at any other base. And as fleet sweepers are being sent by the Commander-in-Chief to this base, according to one of his letters, and there will also be a Fleet Flotilla based there, no special apprehension need be felt. . . .

Personally, I quite agree with the Commander-in-Chief's remarks as to the replacement of *Magnificent* and *Hannibal* [pre-dreadnoughts] by the partially-armed and imperfectly-manned *Royal Arthur* and *Crescent* [cruisers]. A secure base for the Grand Fleet should be one of our primary considerations, and it seems a great pity to change an efficient arrangement for one which is demonstrably less efficient and which is unsatisfactory to the Commander-in-Chief. The original reason for taking away *Magnificent* and *Hannibal* was the contemplated formation of the 8 'Majestics' into a Squadron. *This has been abandoned.* The reason now is that the men are wanted and that the 12-inch barbettes are wanted for the monitors. I would suggest therefore that two more 'Majestics' be paid off and these two be left intact for the Commander-in-Chief. The other 'Majestics' will have to be paid off sooner or later.

¹ Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot, fourth Baronet, Second-in-Command of the 2nd Battle Squadron, 1913-1915.

I also agree with the Commander-in-Chief's remarks as to staff at his base, and his requirements should be met. If the Fleet *feel* that the base is secure, there will be an end to these sudden panics, once a week or so, when they all dash out because a submarine has been sighted outside. It does not *pay* to have the Fleet going in and out continually and needlessly instead of resting and keeping the ships in order. The *Conqueror* and *Monarch* is an illustration¹ — and there will be others before the winter is over if this continues.

F.

[Memorandum attached]

Secret

Battleships and Battle Cruisers

Assuming that 3 battleships (1 from each Division, including Fleet Flagship) of Dreadnought type and one battle cruiser are always away refitting — this will be the minimum for some time with *Conqueror* and *Superb* out of action — and also assuming that at the 'selected' moment all the German Fleet is available (*as it would be*), the position will be:

	<i>Grand Fleet</i>	<i>German</i>
Dreadnought Battleships	20	16
Battle Cruisers	5	4
	—	—
	25	20

Taking older battleships also, with one of our 3rd Battle Squadron under refit always:

Battleships	7	20
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Except numerically, the British 32 are undoubtedly far superior to the German 40. The older German battleships are so inferior to the others that it is doubtful whether they would not be a source of weakness rather than of strength — but it is not intended here to go into any strategical or tactical considerations.

Cruisers

With regard to cruisers, the new organizations in the Grand Fleet are as follows . . . *Total*, 16. Assuming 4 of these are always under

¹ The *Conqueror* had collided with the *Monarch* on December 27th, as the Battle Fleet was entering Scapa. Both dreadnoughts suffered serious damage.

refit, there will be 12 available. Against these Germany may have . . . 6.

Light Cruisers

With regard to light cruisers, the position in the Grand Fleet is . . . 13. Assuming 3 of these always under refit, there will be 10 available. Against these Germany may have . . . 31. *Note* — There is no certainty about the exact numbers, as some are reported lost. This is the maximum. But none of the German light cruisers are considered as attached to Destroyer Flotillas. We must, therefore, include *Galatea* and *Caroline* with ours, making the Grand Fleet total available at any moment 12.

The Grand Fleet is, therefore, weak in light cruisers alone, as compared with the whole German force in Home waters, but in cruisers and light cruisers together they will have available $12+12 = 24$ against $31+6 = 37$.

It may be pointed out that many of the German light cruisers are old and their sea speed is reduced, so that they would hardly take part in a general sortie to any distance from their bases. This numerical superiority is, therefore, more on paper than real.

Destroyers

At the present moment there are attached to the Grand Fleet the 2nd and 4th Flotillas, of 43 destroyers, with the three flotilla leaders, and 29 other destroyers based on Scapa, Cromarty and Rosyth, which would be taken out for a general engagement, making 72 in all. Of these, 14 are undergoing refit or repair, leaving 58 ready for service.

It is difficult to say definitely what destroyer force the German fleets could assemble on a given day in the North Sea. We know as a fact that their destroyers are equally as liable to accident from grounding, collision, heavy weather, etc., as ours, and that they continually require repairs. On the assumption that 8 flotillas complete, or 88 destroyers, could be assembled — and this appears quite possible — *the Grand Fleet with 58 would be at a disadvantage*. It has now been approved, however, to attach the First Flotilla, of 21 destroyers and a light cruiser, to the Grand Fleet at Rosyth, and at the same time to detach 8 destroyers from the Grand Fleet to Portsmouth. Of the First Flotilla, probably 16 will always be ready for service, and the Commander-in-Chief will then have $58-8+16 = 66$ available at any moment. The position will then be more satisfactory, in view of the reinforcements from other East Coast bases.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

Ship for ship, considering size, speed, gun power, and seagoing qualities, our destroyers are superior, and this must be taken into consideration.

It certainly appears desirable that the First Flotilla should be dispatched to Rosyth as soon as possible, even without waiting for Fearless or Woolwich, if this can be done, the eight 'River' Class coming down to Rosyth and leaving when the others arrive. This is necessary because there are now a number of battleships, cruisers and light cruisers based on Rosyth, and no adequate destroyer force is present to accompany them to sea.

F.

20.1.15

108: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

January 20th, 1915

First Sea Lord.

You seem to have altered your views, since taking office, about the relative strengths of the British and German Grand and High Sea Fleets. In November you advised the removal of *Princess Royal*, *Inflexible*, and *Invincible*, together with 8 'King Edwards' and 5 'Duncans', a total of 16 capital ships, from the Grand Fleet, some for temporary duties of importance, but the battleships for permanent service in the south. The dispositions were carried out. Since then the Commander-in-Chief has received back the 8 'King Edwards' and the *Princess Royal*; he has gained the *Indomitable*; he has received the *Warrior*, *Duke of Edinburgh*, *Black Prince*, *Gloucester*, *Yarmouth*, *Caroline*, *Galatea*, *Donegal* and *Leviathan* [cruisers and light cruisers], together with 16 destroyers additional, and, I think, about 50 extra trawlers and yachts. These are immense additions to his strength, and I know of no new circumstances which have arisen or of reinforcements which have reached the enemy which ought to make us anxious now if we were not anxious before these great additions reached Sir John Jellicoe.

However, in view of your minute and of the importance of reassuring the Commander-in-Chief so far as possible, it seems to me that the following arrangements might be made:

1. The 1st Destroyer Flotilla to join the Grand Fleet as soon as *Penelope* and *Inconstant* arrive at Harwich. (We cannot allow our

forces there to be reduced till we are powerless even to reconnoitre the enemy.)

2. *Galatea*, *Caroline*, *Cordelia*, and *Phaeton* to form a new Light Cruiser Squadron for the Grand Fleet as soon as possible.

3. The 1st Cruiser Squadron to be retained by the Commander-in-Chief until the new Light Cruiser Squadron has been formed.

4. I cannot understand his complaint about *Hannibal* and *Magnificent*. These vessels have been asked for to prevent barrier-breaking ships approaching the booms, and as defences against destroyer attack. The 6-inch guns of the *Crescent* and *Royal Arthur*, now on their way North, are ample for this purpose, and there can be no need whatever for 12-inch-gun ships in those positions. The Commander-in-Chief's views about the complements should, however, be met, the complements strengthened accordingly, and the two present captains of the *Magnificent* and *Hannibal* transferred to the new vessels.

5. As soon as convenient, the 2 'Lord Nelsons' [pre-dreadnoughts *Lord Nelson* and *Agamemnon*] and the 6 remaining 'Formidables', forming the 5th Battle Squadron, should be transferred from Portland to Rosyth, where they could set the 3rd Battle Squadron free to rejoin the Commander-in-Chief at Scapa or Cromarty. . . .

6. The battle cruisers ought to be kept together, as then we shall always have a force strong enough to beat the whole of the German fast vessels. They will be quite out of reach for any action to protect the coasts of England if they go to Cromarty, which is the same distance from Heligoland as Scapa. I therefore think they should not be divided or moved from the Forth, unless Admiral Beatty reports that he finds the navigational conditions dangerous. The outer line defences of the Forth are now nearly completed. There is a considerable force of trawlers, torpedo boats and submarines there under the direction of Admiral Lowry,¹ who has shown himself to be a most energetic and capable officer. I see no reason why they should be mined in there more than at Cromarty, and in any case they ought never to proceed to sea without the channels being properly swept beforehand. There is good seaplane protection at the Forth, which can be reinforced if necessary.

7. The refit of *Invincible* should be accelerated to the utmost. The necessary additional fitters asked for should be sent from home to Gibraltar. The *Inflexible* can sail for home on February 12. *Australia*

¹ Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir Robert Lowry, commanding on the coast of Scotland, 1913-1916.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

can stand by to reinforce the Grand Fleet in case of a casualty until either *Invincible* or *Inflexible* has got home.

I hope you will consider that these measures meet the case put forward in your minute.¹

W. S. C.

109: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

January 20th, 1915

First Lord.

... As you rightly say, it is of the highest importance to reassure the Commander-in-Chief. I would like on his behalf [in accordance with his views] so frequently reiterated to me to press for the return of *Blenheim* [destroyer depot ship] and Destroyer Flotilla from Dardanelles, replacing them by French destroyers. The whole Turkish naval force is quite a negligible quantity even with German officers (with the *Goeben* knocked out, as we know her to be!), and therefore French destroyers and French submarines, if more are wanted, should be called upon. The Australian submarine ought to come home to the much required submarine duties in the North Sea. I understand she is the best we have and [it is] therefore inexcusable to waste her on the Turks.²

F.

¹ As regards point 6, 'I discussed this question and other matters connected with the strength of the Grand Fleet with Lord Fisher fully the next morning, and he agreed to the view which I took. I thereafter minuted to the Chief of Staff, in the afternoon of the 21st: 'The battle-cruisers should be kept together at the Forth as at present, unless Admiral Beatty reports that he finds the navigational conditions dangerous. . . . Action accordingly'' (*The World Crisis*, II, 125). As regards the First Lord's other points: 'Lord Fisher accepted these arrangements but returned to the charge on the question of destroyers, admittedly our weakest point' (*ibid.*, II, 153).

² 'I could not agree to this, as of course it would have paralysed the Dardanelles Fleet and destroyed the plans which the staff were maturing. At the same time Sir Arthur Wilson continued to press for action against Zeebrugge . . . This double pressure brought matters to a head' (*ibid.*, II, 153-4).

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

II0: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 20th, 1915

Burn this letter, please!

Dear Beatty,

. . . I hope to lay down 6,000 mines near the Dover Straits next week, this also private, and we have this week put 370 trawlers into the British Channel to humbug the German submarines. Why on earth the German Battle Cruiser Squadron have not rushed Dover straits and Pegasus'd the Channel Squadron in Portland Harbour and swallowed the Cruiser Squadrons in the chops of the Channel and gone home via Iceland, I can't understand! But these 6,000 mines will now block them! KEEP PRIVATE!

Yours,

Fisher

III: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 21st, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

. . . This Dardanelles operation, decided upon by the Cabinet, in its taking away *Queen Elizabeth*, *Indefatigable* and *Inflexible* and *Blenheim*, with a flotilla of destroyers arranged to have been brought home, is a serious interference with our imperative needs in Home waters, and I've fought against it 'tooth and nail'. But, of course, if the Government of the Country decide on a project as a subject of high policy, one can't put oneself up to govern the diplomatic attitude of the nation in its relation with foreign powers, and apparently the Grand Duke Nicholas has demanded this step, or — (I suppose he would make peace with Germany, which is really on the tapis in Russia through the herculean efforts of M. de Witte, the Finance Minister, who is a German through and through!) The making of peace with Germany behind our backs by France and Russia is really quite a possible event, I hear, as Germany has got THE ONE THING she wanted, in Antwerp and the Belgian coast, and on peace being made she would compel Holland to join Germany with an independence like Bavaria.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

I fully enter into all your feelings as regards the German High Sea Fleet with its '*selected*' moment and you with your '*average*' moment. On the other hand, you have enormously increased the power of your individual ships since the beginning of the war by the additions of *Erin*, *Benbow*, *Tiger*, and other new vessels. After all, the immense superiority of the 13½-inch guns *MUST* tell, and the German Fleet, since I came to the Admiralty, *have never once*, either in the Baltic or North Sea, been out to exercise — three months with never one single day's tactics! while you seem hardly ever to be in harbour for more than a week at a time! I'm now trying to get the *Warspite* pushed on to join you sooner.

I just abominate the Dardanelles operation, unless a great change is made and it is settled to be made a military operation, with 200,000 men in conjunction with the Fleet. I believe that Kitchener is coming now to this sane view of the matter.

There's not the faintest likelihood of the German High Sea Fleet ever acting for naval reasons, whenever it does come out. It will be ordered out by General Falkenhayn, the Chief of the General Staff, for purely military reasons.

We failed to catch the 40 German destroyers that went out scouting, but I believe we prevented a raid by *Derfflinger*, *Seydlitz* & Co.!¹

Yours always,

Fisher

The Germans magnified Beatty into the whole Fleet being out! They counted 100 vessels!! Tankers, I suppose, behind Beatty's ships!

It never seems to me that you are any the stronger for having the 'King Edward' class! They *must* seriously delay and hamper you by their want of speed, etc., as compared with the rest of the Fleet. What *WOULD* you do [with] them?

¹ On January 19th Beatty had steamed west of Heligoland Bight to support a reconnaissance in force by Tyrwhitt's light forces. Nothing happened.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

112: FROM QUEEN ALEXANDRA

Sandringham

January 21st, 1915

My dear Lord Fisher,

This is *too* bad, those beasts actually went straight to Sandringham,¹ I suppose in the hopes of exterminating us with their Zeppelin bombs — though, thank God, they failed this time! But they killed and wounded as usual a lot of poor innocent women and children of King's Lynn, I am sorry to say.

Please let me have a lot of *rockets* with spikes or hooks on to defend our Norfolk coast. I am sure you could invent something of the sort which might bring down a few of those rascals. What shall we do in London where they are sure to appear with an army of 64 [*sic*], as we have been told. *Do* send me the rockets.

Yours ever affectionately,

Alexandra

113: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall

January 22nd, 1915

My beloved Jellicoe,

It's quite a weight off my mind that you are going to take a 'spell off'! *but don't spoil it by going to Cromarty every half hour!* I think it is now settled that you keep Arbuthnot with *Defence*, *Warrior*, *Black Prince*, and *Edinburgh* until you get a THIRD light cruiser squadron shortly of new ships — *Cordelia*, etc. I forget the names. *Phaeton* is one, I think — all finished but going to Gibraltar for gunnery, etc. The *Inflexible* is to leave Dardanelles on February 12 for Scapa Flow direct, and the *Invincible*, directly she is finished at Gibraltar, and the *Australia* ready at Plymouth to send you in an emergency. This was fixed yesterday, but it's truly awful how we change plans! Bethell² with *Nelson*, *Agamemnon*, and 6 'Formidables' to come to Rosyth, and

¹ During the night of January 19th-20th two Zeppelins had dropped bombs on King's Lynn, Yarmouth, and Sheringham, killing two men and two women and injuring seventeen men, women, and children. This was the first time the Zeppelins had penetrated inland.

² Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) the Hon. Sir Alexander Bethell, Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet, 1915, in succession to Bayly.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

Bradford to rejoin you at Scapa Flow. All the battle cruisers to be always kept together under Beatty at Rosyth. It's too dangerous in case of a big southern attack by the Germans to have Beatty any further north. He really ought to be at the Humber, but at present only inner anchorage at Humber is absolutely submarine-proof, and only room for 6 big ships, I believe (*they say 8*). Good moorings are being laid down for 8 battleships.

The extra pair of guns you would like in new battle cruiser are absolutely inadmissible, because of loss of speed from 33 knots which is almost certain, *great increase in draught of water, and displacement and cost*. She will only now draw 25 feet, if *that*! The *Queen Elizabeth* draws *over 35 feet*!

Yours,

F.

P.S. Eight 13½-inch guns equally damnable. Besides, the 13½-inch gun is now obsolete. No more to be made. We shall go in for an 18-inch gun now.

114: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 23rd, 1914

My beloved Jellicoe,

For some subtle reason I can't fathom the Prime Minister wants you to attend the next War Council on Thursday next. It's absolutely wrong your leaving the Fleet, and Winston agrees with me.¹ They say Sir John French came over last week, but he only commands $\frac{1}{10}$ th of the line of battle; you command $\frac{1}{10}$ ths! That's the difference! Joffre orders our Army about as you would a cruiser! (It's an ignoble part our Army plays!) Besides, French can get back in five hours, if wanted. Your coming means three days' absence, at the very least!

There is so much intriguing going on that I never know what is up! A written decision was come to that the British Army should co-operate with the British Fleet and advance along the sea frontier to

¹ See Churchill to Asquith, January 22nd, 1915 (*The World Crisis*, II, 125-7), which letter 'reassured' the Prime Minister.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

the Dutch border, bombarding Zeebrugge, on February 15. *The day was fixed*. Now this is cancelled and no reason given! But they want us to bombard all the same with futile results, as in three weeks they have made good again!¹ and we risk the loss of six battleships! A high Dutch officer told us that if only 10,000 English or French troops could have been landed, or co-operating by advance on the coast at Zeebrugge, when we last bombarded it, there would have been a German rout for certain! It's all maddening! They are all so weak-kneed!

I haven't time to write more. I have got a cold in the head and all the papers have made a song [i.e., fuss] of it! I'm getting out a new light cruiser, to be completed by Cammell Laird in 11 months: 33 knots speed, 23 feet draught of water, four 15-inch guns! What a surprise for Tirpitz!

Yours,

F.

115: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 25th, 1915

Secret

First Lord.

Our North Sea experiences clearly indicate that a cruiser of 32 knots speed and 22½ feet draught of water, carrying four 15-inch guns, associated with groups of 4-inch guns on turntables for dealing with destroyers, would as completely knock out all the German light cruisers as the *Invincible* knocked out the *Scharnhorst*. It would be a repetition of the old argument that the big gun and high speed, besides giving you certain victory, avoid having any killed or wounded. But chiefly is this type of vessel imperatively demanded for the Baltic, where she can go through the international highway of the Sound owing to her shallow draught. Such a vessel is now presented for adoption, capable of completion within a year, and in the hope of secrecy being secured, only the two firms selected should be dealt with.²

F.

¹ That is, the Germans had repaired the damage.

² These were the light battle cruisers which completed Fisher's programme of five battle cruisers. See Letter No. 120.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

116: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 25th, 1915

Burn.

My dear Beatty,

A few lines of sincere gratitude for your good fight!¹ I feel the death of Engineer-Captain C. G. Taylor most acutely. You don't know what a faithful and loyal friend he was to me!

It will be interesting to hear how your firing affected the German ships. The *Seydlitz* and *Derfflinger* (*but don't mention this fact to a soul, as we get it through an Agency*) had to hustle into dock, and yet not one single casualty in *Derfflinger*. I suppose the *Lion* hit a German mine. I do hope you will be able to repair her rapidly, as these incidents will be repeated, as the *Lützow* is coming along for early commission. Sad that *Queen Mary* was away. I won't burden you with more. Don't trouble to reply — you will be too busy. Jellicoe will never be in it — he is too far off at Scapa — he might as well be at Timbuctoo! He ought to be at Rosyth, as you ought to be at the Humber, now the submarine defence is finished and 8 berths ready.

Yours always,

Fisher

117: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 27th, 1915

Burn when read.

Strictly Private and Confidential

My dear Beatty,

I've already written to tell you that you're splendid! But I cannot understand when you were left behind in *Lion* why *Tiger* and *Princess Royal*, absolutely unharmed, did not go on and finish off *Derfflinger* and *Seydlitz*, VERY HEAVILY ON FIRE (BOTH OF THEM) (*I hear this from eyewitnesses*), and both seriously damaged, and this 'cessation' of fighting takes place at NOON, when still 3 hours off the enemy's

¹ The reference is to the Dogger Bank action of January 24th, when Beatty, with five battle cruisers and a superior force of light cruisers and destroyers, met three German battle cruisers (plus the *Blücher*, which was practically a battle cruiser), with supporting light cruisers and destroyers, in the middle of the North Sea. The *Blücher* was sunk, and the other German ships, badly damaged, had fled.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

minefields (or possibly 4 hours). You are mistaken about the enemy's submarines — we know from themselves exactly where they were — hours off you. (*Burn this at once, please, and say nothing of this fact.*) I've only time for this very hurried line, *but it is simply ABSOLUTELY INCOMPREHENSIBLE to me why Moore discontinued the action at NOON!* when the *Seydlitz* and *Derfflinger* both heavily on fire and very badly damaged and they had to scuttle into dock with great urgency and a very great number of killed. It's quite terrible to me that they should have been allowed to go free at noon. WHAT POSSIBLE EXPLANATION IS THERE? What excuse have we to offer!

Yours in haste,

Fisher

118: TO H. H. ASQUITH

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 28th, 1915

Private and Personal

My dear Prime Minister,

I am giving this note to Colonel Hankey to hand to you to explain my absence from the War Council. I am not in accord with the First Lord and do not think it would be seemly to say so before the Council. His reply to my memorandum does not meet my case.¹ I say that the

¹ Fisher had submitted a 'Memorandum on the Position of the British Fleet and its Policy of Steady Pressure' to Churchill on January 25th. (It seems to have been written in November 1914 and printed in January 1915.) It is reproduced in *The World Crisis*, II, 154-7, with a few unimportant deviations from the printed copy in the Fisher Papers. Churchill adds: 'The paper was not, I think, except for the last few characteristic sentences, Lord Fisher's own composition. It had been prepared in accordance with his directions. It was, of course, absolutely counter to all my convictions. No one, certainly, wished to "dissipate our strength in operations that cannot improve the position". To write thus was to beg the question. But the naval policy emerging from its last sentence ["Being already in possession of all that a powerful fleet can give a country, we should continue quietly to enjoy the advantage without dissipating our strength in operations that cannot improve the position"] would have condemned us to complete inactivity. It was no doubt the policy pursued by the Commander-in-Chief and the Admiralty after I quitted office. It was the policy which led directly to the supreme submarine peril in 1917' (*ibid.*, II, 157). Churchill's answering memorandum of January 26th appears in *The World Crisis*, II, 159-62, where the date is given as the 27th. A covering note reads: 'There is no difference in principle between us. But when all your special claims are met, you must let the surplus be used for the general cause. I suggest I show your memo and my comment to the Prime Minister, instead of printing and circulating the documents. You and I are so much stronger together.' Asquith received a copy of Fisher's memorandum, but 'did not in his discretion circulate it to the War Council in view of my acrimonious attitude against the Dardanelles operations then being incepted' (Fisher's marginal note on a copy of his memorandum).

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

Zeebrugge and Dardanelles bombardments can only be justified on naval grounds by military co-operation, which would compensate for the loss in ships and irreplaceable officers and men. As purely naval operations they are unjustifiable,¹ as they both drain our naval margin — not too large in view of collisions, such as *Conqueror* and *Monarch*, mines and submarines, such as *Audacious* and *Formidable*, and other previous great losses, and fools as admirals, such as Bayly and others, who you can no more account for beforehand than for Sir Redvers Buller, who, with a Victoria Cross, was seized with mental paralysis on the field of battle at Colenso and Spionkopf! We are at this moment vitally in want of destroyers, wrongly kept at the Dardanelles in opposition to my representations. We are sending our best submarine to the Dardanelles and our largest and most valuable battleship, the *Queen Elizabeth*, with the only 15-inch guns ready at present, besides sending other battle cruisers now there against my protest. What will our officers and men say to me if I agreed to those 15-inch guns being in Asia Minor, when at any moment the great crisis may occur in the North Sea and the German High Sea Fleet be driven to fight by the German Military Headquarters as part of some military operation? I am very reluctant to leave the First Lord. I have a great personal affection and admiration for him, but I see no possibility of a union of ideas, and unity is essential in war, so I refrain from any desire of remaining as a stumbling block.

The British Empire ceases if our Grand Fleet ceases. No risks can be taken.

Yours truly,

Fisher

Postscript. Since my conversation with the First Lord last night and the sending to you of my memorandum, I have got these quite spontaneous and unsolicited words from Sir John Jellicoe in a letter just come: 'The battle cruiser action [Dogger Bank] showed most conclusively the absolute necessity of a BIG preponderance of these ships and I hope will at any rate result in no diversion of any "Queen Elizabeths" or any battle cruisers from the decisive theatre (the North Sea). Had we lost the *Lion*, the victory would have turned into a defeat.'

¹ At this point the following was inserted when Fisher later had the letter printed: '(because the results not permanent).'

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

119: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 28th, 1915

Private

My dear Fisher,

The Prime Minister considers your presence at the War Council indispensable, and so do I. He will receive us both at 11.10, so that we can have a talk beforehand.

You have assented to both the operations in question, and so far as I am concerned there can be no withdrawal, without good reason, from measures which are necessary, and for which preparations are far advanced.

I would infinitely sooner work with you than with Sturdee, who will undoubtedly be forced upon me in the eventuality of which you write so lightheartedly.¹

Yours ever,

W.

120: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 29th, 1915

Private and Confidential

BURN.

My beloved Jellicoe,

Don't worry about anything at all, for everything is quiet and going nicely!

I had fierce rows with Winston and the Prime Minister, and it was a near thing! I was six hours yesterday with them and War

¹ Fisher and Churchill met in the Prime Minister's room that morning, shortly before the War Council began its crucial deliberations. 'Lord Fisher indicated very briefly his objections to both the Zeebrugge and Dardanelles schemes, and indicated his preference for a great operation in the Baltic or for a general advance of the Army along the Belgian coast with strong naval support. Lord Fisher, say the Dardanelles Commissioners, "did not criticize the attack on the Gallipoli Peninsula on its own merits. Neither did he mention to the Prime Minister that he had any thought of resigning if his opinions were overruled". This is quite true. I contended that both Zeebrugge and the Dardanelles scheme should be undertaken, but that if either were to be dropped it should be Zeebrugge, to which the First Sea Lord seemed more particularly opposed. The Prime Minister, after hearing both sides, expressed his concurrence with my views, and decided that Zeebrugge should be dropped but that the Dardanelles should go forward. Lord Fisher seemed on the whole content, and I went downstairs with him under the impression that all was well. The Council was already waiting' (*The World Crisis*, II, 162-3).

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

Council and sat till 8 p.m.! They are a 'flabby' lot! However, a calm has resulted and I go on pegging away. I got two more 'light cruisers' carrying 15-inch guns yesterday, of 33 knots speed and 22 feet draught of water, and oil for 11,000 miles, and 24 more monitors, so we are getting on!

I am making a row about your not having been told about the *Conqueror*. *Indefatigable* and *Invincible* are being hurried home, but their defects are serious — they are working night and day at Malta and Gibraltar. *Australia*, *Indefatigable*, and *New Zealand* will be in one squadron under Patey.¹ *Invincible* and *Indomitable* and *Inflexible* (when we get her) will be another squadron of three, and *Queen Mary*, *Tiger*, and *Princess Royal* another three, and all three Squadrons under Beatty in *Lion* (I suppose we must make him Acting Admiral), making 10 in all! I think we had best keep *Queen Elizabeth* and *Warspite* together for special service. I am hustling the *Warspite*.

Winston has gone to France on a political mission from the Cabinet. Now do, I beg you, rest quiet and not worry. The Germans are like lambs. I enclose you a paper I sent the Prime Minister, but he won't circulate it, so please keep secret. I think it's rather good.

Don't bother to write.

Yours for evermore,

F.

121: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
January 31st, 1915

Private and Personal

BURN.

My dear Beatty,

I've quite made up my mind. Your conduct was glorious! '*Beatty beatus!*' *Moore's was despicable!* *The Captain of the Tiger* (I forget his name) *was a poltroon!* He was a long way ahead, he ought to have gone on, had he the slightest Nelsonic temperament in him, regardless of signals! like Nelson at Copenhagen and St. Vincent!

¹ Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir George Patey, about to assume the command of the 2nd (*Australia*, *Indefatigable*, *New Zealand*) and 3rd (three 'Invincibles') Battle Squadrons of the Battle Cruiser Fleet, though, as it turned out, only for a few weeks.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

In war the first principle is to disobey orders. *Any fool can obey orders!*¹

Yours,

Fisher

Why didn't the *Tiger* go out with you the other day when ordered? Practically she is in fuel, so the constructors say. $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour would have finished the *Derfflinger* and *Seydlitz*!

122: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall

February 2nd, 1915

My beloved Jellicoe,

It is good news that the doctors telegraph to me that you are doing so well.² Now do please take it easy and d—n Rosyth and everything else that worries you and simply play bridge! You are worth more than a hundred Rosyths or dozens of battleships, so put that in your pipe and smoke it, and take things easy!

I am PERFECTLY SURE you are right about the tunny nets from Lagos. I know them so well from bitter experience as to their wonderful qualities, but this Admiralty is really a terrible place for apathy. I have to lose my temper every day to push things.

My fond love to your ladies. Too busy to write more.

Yours always,

Fisher

¹ Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Henry B. Pelly commanded the battle cruiser *Tiger*, 1914-1916. In the last stage of the battle the German Battle Cruiser Squadron, though half-beaten, had been left alone. The *Tiger* and *Princess Royal* had concentrated on the *Blücher*, not having taken in Beatty's signal: "Keep closer to the enemy." See Corbett: *Naval Operations*, II, 96-7. A day or two later Fisher wrote to Beatty: 'From what I have just been hearing from an "onlooker" on January 24, I can't understand how you let off Pelly. . . . Apparently *Moltke* had calm and quiet target practice, unalloyed by any distractions, and *Tiger's* shots some 2,000 yards over.' However, the poor gunnery of the *Tiger* was at least partly due to the fact that she was a new ship and had been with the squadron only some two months.

² 'During February Sir John [Jellicoe] had himself to go into dock. Exposure and hard work brought on what, fortunately, was not a serious illness, though one that required a slight operation and a period of rest. He entered a nursing home . . . He had hardly entered before there arrived a specialist surgeon from London, another from Edinburgh and a trained nurse. These, unknown to Sir John, had been sent by Lord Fisher — a typical "Jacky" Fisher action. He looked on Sir John's health as of infinite value to the nation, and did not intend that there should be any doubt about his speedy recovery' (Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon: *The Life of John Rushworth, Earl Jellicoe* [London, 1936], p. 228).

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 3rd, 1915

Private

Dear Beatty,

Winston gave me a delightful account of his stay with you!¹ I sympathize with you preferring Cromarty to Rosyth, but if you had been at Cromarty we couldn't have had the *Blücher* [battle cruiser]! It's 150 miles too far off. Nevertheless I admit there are big compensations, but to go out in daylight with a lot of large ships and the German submarines so ably handled is a very serious risk. On the other hand, less risks of mines at Cromarty than Rosyth. I agree with you about Cowan.² *He ought to have gone to Tiger*, but Keyes is 'a fancy man'! Why, I don't know. He has made a d—d mess of the submarines in the last 3 years.³ However, this is private. Myself I have a very great opinion of Pakenham. 'He's a brave man!' (Togo said this of him to the Mikado.)⁴ We want brave men! ANY BLOODY FOOL CAN OBEY ORDERS! What we want is a man who can disobey orders and win victories like Nelson at Copenhagen and St. Vincent!

Always yours,

Fisher

¹ One bit of intelligence from Churchill was disturbing: 'Beatty tells the First Lord yesterday in conversation he dashes out to sea without any mine-sweeping at all from Rosyth these last three times he has lately issued out! *This is awful!*' (Fisher to Rear-Admiral [afterwards Admiral Sir] Edward F. B. Charlton, Admiral of Minesweepers, 1914-1915, February 2nd, 1915). But there is this partial explanation anyway: 'Sir D. Beatty was ordered out for the 24th January action and given a position which he could only reach in time by passing over an area which had been reported as infested with mines. He fortunately missed them all. . . . The truth is that Sir A. Wilson has not realized the effect that mines and submarines have on present day naval warfare' (Jellicoe to McKenna, May 23rd, 1915; McKenna Papers).

² Captain (afterwards Admiral, first Baronet) Walter H. Cowan, commanding the *Princess Royal*, 1st Battle Cruiser Squadron, 1915-1917.

³ 'On no account imagine that I have designs on you! . . . but . . . I have not yet mastered on what basis our submarines harm the enemy more than themselves!' (Fisher to Keyes, November 8th, 1914, and see Keyes's reply in his *The Naval Memoirs of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, 1910-1915* [London, 1934], p. 133).

⁴ Rear-Admiral Pakenham commanded the 3rd Cruiser Squadron of the Battle Cruiser Fleet, 1913-1917. For the Mikado reference, see *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 156, n. 3.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

124: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall

February 6th, 1915

Dear Beatty,

Herculean efforts are without doubt in progress to repair *Derfflinger* and *Seydlitz*. So they may indeed have them ready before we have repaired *Lion* and *Indomitable*! So don't relax your vigilance and readiness and gunnery training. The *Lützow* (a little faster than *Derfflinger*, I believe) will be ready soon now. At last the world is seeing the battle cruiser is the 'breath of life'! (Lucky I got two more laid down of 33 knots the first week I arrived at the Admiralty! against great opposition.)¹ All the d—d rabble that yelped at my heels are dumb dogs now. *D—n 'em!* and they WILL be damned! I always love Joseph's answer to his brethren: 'Fear not . . . am I in the place of God?' He knew they would get their reward all right, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched!

Is the *Tiger's* Gunnery Lieutenant² efficient? *We cannot have a single inefficient person — OFFICER OR MAN — in the battle cruisers, and I call on you to send me a list of everyone who wants replacing, however high or low!* This is wartime and we can't have any d—d folly about susceptibilities. Don't you worry about any odium — I will take that and love it.

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. I am too pressed to write more. I began at 3 a.m. to-day!

125: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall

February 6th, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

I congratulate you with all my heart on your good progress, and you seem to have a 'spiffing' doctor in Willan (so I hear from people here!).

¹ Fisher is no doubt referring to the *Renown* and *Repulse*, which were not actually laid down until January 1915.

² Lieutenant-Commander (afterwards Captain) Evan Bruce-Gardyne was the Gunnery Lieutenant of the *Tiger*.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

All is quiet so far, but we are to have 24 German submarines in the English Channel on February 18! *That won't trouble you!* So 'sleep quiet in YOUR bed'! I hope to have *Warspite* sail for Scapa Flow on March 14, and put her with Beatty as a 'backer-up'! I hope she will do 26 knots on a pinch, so will go with *Indomitable*, *Invincible*, and *Inflexible* quite well! I hope *Inflexible*, *Invincible*, and *Indefatigable* will all three be on their way to join you the end of next week.

It's a most terrible and deplorable calamity that *Tiger* did not pursue the flying enemy, who was in such DEEP DISTRESS from fire and damage, and Moore not following the *Tiger* in the chase! *Never was there anything ever so deplorable!!!* I'm told the *Tiger* had a lot of gunnery practice, so why is her gunnery so fearfully bad? Does the Gunnery Lieutenant want changing? Perhaps this could be ascertained.

We have started 12 more monitors, so we shall have 26 now ready in the summer! and 8 big submarines of 21 knots speed, I hope, and a 12-pounder!

We have arranged for the Medway floating dock being moored in the Tyne, and work is progressing vigorously.

Yours till Paradise,

Fisher

To-day we have sold Langham House. We could not afford to keep it on — a sad wrench!

126: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 8th, 1915

My beloved Jellicoe,

I fear I sent you a '*thunder and lightning*' letter yesterday, being in an aggressive mood at the moment of writing to you, having just had a row with Charlton over the mine-sweeping, which I do not think well organized as it should be as one big scheme, and not so much done as I had hoped by his recent visit to everyone up and down the coast. But I won't trouble you with that matter till I have elaborated further, for some of Charlton's work now is QUITE SILLY in searching areas that by no possibility will EVER be traversed! I am

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

going to join up Admiral Ommanney¹ in the job, who I discover, after three weeks work with him in laying our new minefield, is worth his weight in gold! Why hasn't he been employed? Echo only answers, 'Why?'

The *Tiger's* gunnery seems to have been villainously bad on January 24, yet she seems to have had a lot of practice. These battle cruisers ought to have the very best of everything. I think you are the originator of the expression that the battle cruiser is '*our breath of life*' as regards naval existence!

As I told you yesterday, I firmly believe our Battle Fleet will not be required this war, but the business will be fixed up by our 14 battle cruisers plus *Queen Elizabeth* and *Warspite*, when they are all in line within the year, and they *must* stick at Rosyth permanently, as they won't get to '*the spot*' in time from Cromarty or Scapa. *They can't*. All the same, the conclusion is inevitable that there is no other place for the Battle Squadrons than Scapa.

Yours always,

F.

My fond love to the ladies! All is quiet *except Zeppelins*, who can't reach the Caledonian Hotel [Inverness]!

P.S. Message to Lady Jellicoe from First Sea Lord: Do not allow a single paper from the Fleet and order Madden to keep away and every other naval officer. Sir Watson Cheyne² said to me he left special orders.

127: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 8th, 1915

Dear Beatty,

With the activities of threatened 20 German submarines in Channel and Irish Sea, it's not possible to have heavy ships coming south for repair, which is why *Lion* and *Indomitable* have been arranged to be repaired up north. I hope you'll make the Dockyard

¹ Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Robert N. Ommanney, at the Admiralty for special service, 1915-1918.

² Sir Watson Cheyne, first Baronet, President of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, 1914-1917, and Consulting Surgeon, R.N., 1914-1915.

workmen in *Indomitable* comfortable, and then they will work harder. I forget if I told you, we have started two new 'light cruisers', *which will join your flag next December*. They carry **15-inch** guns, only **21** feet draught of water, and go **33** knots. Radius of action **11,000** miles! A surprise packet for Tirpitz! We are keeping it so secret that the whole correspondence about them is only on one half-sheet of notepaper, with Lloyd George's initials for $2\frac{1}{2}$ millions sterling to pay the bill!¹ I will get you the model to look at. *They are gems!*

I don't believe the Battle Squadrons will be in this war. **THE BATTLE CRUISERS** will finish the job! **IF ONLY THEIR GUNNERY IS PERFECTION!** Imagine! the *Invincible*, which was leading ship and did the whole fight and sunk the prize gunnery ships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, *had not a single person killed or wounded!* The *Invincible* *hit first, hit hard, and kept on hitting!* And yet, my dear friend, I was vilified by Custance, Beresford, and a whole mass of others for introducing those 'hybrid monsters', the battle cruisers! and the moment I left the Admiralty all hands set to work to put in 6-inch guns again, with the result that the *Queen Elizabeth* draws **35** feet of water and only goes 25 knots instead of **30** KNOTS. The six-inch guns in her will never plant a hit on the enemy and they will be drowned in a seaway as the poor *Good Hope's* six-inch guns were!

Yours,

Fisher

128: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 9th, 1915

BURN.

Dear Beatty,

Now that I am so busy dragging masses of weights and *luxuries* out of the *Warspite* to make her go faster, *27 knots, I hope!* and be a fit companion to *Indefatigable*, *New Zealand*, and *Australia*, it occurs to me whether all your ships have any excess weights that could be got rid of *so as to make all of them faster!* You might let your clever young men *look into this!* For myself I cannot understand on what earthly grounds you keep your ships full of coal and oil in the restricted area

¹ David Lloyd George (afterwards first Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor), Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1908-1915.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

of the North Sea fighting — at the very most you would not in any fight you can imagine want to go more than 500 miles at top speed, *so why carry enough to go 3,000 miles!!!!* and make yourself go slower and carry all that damnable dead weight of unnecessary fuel? Had you gone 2 knots faster on January 24, you might have finished them off before the big fiasco!

The Engineer-in-Chief¹ asked me yesterday why the *Tiger*, with her big excess of speed, did not pursue the flying enemy. Instead of answering him, I talked about the weather!

Always yours,

Fisher

The *Queen Elizabeth* now draws 35 feet of water. When full of fuel, she goes 25 knots at 32½ feet draught, *so there's a hell of a lot to be done to get 27 knots!!!* When the *Queen Elizabeth* goes full speed, she drops her stern and draws 40 feet!!!

129: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 12th, 1915

Secret

Dear Beatty,

A few lines to tell you that all our intelligence points to all future fighting being in your hands and that the German High Sea Fleet won't come out for a big job. They'll emerge and retire! But the new *Lützow*, the *Derfflinger*, the *Seydlitz*, and the *Von der Tann* will try an escapade *à la* Scarborough just for half-an-hour's bombardment of our coast in the break of dawn, and nip back with mines dropping freely behind them and submarines in front of them to waylay you. They are in holy terror of the 13½-inch guns and the big speed of the *Lion* and *Tiger*. *These two ships can outstrip them!* (Apparently *Queen Mary* and *Princess Royal* much slower. *Why?*) *So you've got to get the gunnery of the LION and the TIGER to the very best pitch of perfection!!!!*

'There's a beauty in the bellow of the blast,
There's a glory in the growling of the gale,

¹ Engineer Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Oran, Engineer-in-Chief of the Fleet, 1907-1917.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

There's an eloquent out-pouring
When the *Lion* is a-roaring
And the *Tiger* is a-lashing of her tail.'

Yours always,

Fisher

Secret. This will interest you. I arrived at Admiralty on October 30. On November 15 we began to lay down the following 187 new vessels, and they will all be fighting within a year, and yet some d—d pessimists say we are a decaying nation! . . .

130: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 20th, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

Are you sure you will have got quite strong enough by March 1st, as I hear that is the day you return? *Please take a few more days ashore and enjoy your golf!*

I've been superlatively busy and unable to write to you. At least 70,000 troops are going to be sent to Gallipoli — 'too late', I fear! This is a war of 'lost opportunities'! *naval* as well as *military*! Wonderful to relate, I've been able to find quite unexpectedly in London the THREE men I relied on for forcing the Dardanelles at the time of the Boer War (as was then contemplated): Grech, the Greek contractor who owns all the small steamers in the Levant;¹ Cottrell, who lived at Syra as manager of the Eastern Telegraph Company and decoded all the foreign cypher telegrams; and Maurice Fitzgerald, the Dragoman of the British Embassy, who was on board the *Renown* with me. *It is luck!* and I've engaged all three at *stupendous* salaries as a reward for old times!

'Never forget a friend,
Never forgive an enemy.'

It is kind of you to prune down Sturdee's reports. MUCH WANTED! Also we don't want the world to say, 'Why did they not pursue

¹ Vincent Grech, a Maltese, was commissioned by the Admiralty to buy small craft in the Mediterranean for the Dardanelles campaign. He had little luck in procuring the needed vessels.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

Derfflinger & Co.?' We have just heard from a reliable agent that the two after turrets of *Derfflinger* and guns irretrievably damaged, and two of her boilers beyond repair. Alas! Alas! The Germans must indeed think it a miracle they got away!

All sorts of wonderful rumours of some marvellous German naval operation commencing this morning!

Heaven bless you! I entreat you not to overdo *yourself*.

Yours,

F.

131: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 23rd, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

We are pretty busy with the thousand submarines that are reported (*everyone sees a submarine!*). We are supposed to have caught three of them in nets, but I don't believe it. Also our new mines are supposed to have blown up two (so we hear from Cuxhaven yesterday!). I believe another American ship with cotton was blown up by a German mine off Heligoland yesterday.

Winston has been three days in bed with influenza, but it don't lessen the activities of his pen! I am getting more busy every day and less time to write to you as I should wish. It's Heaven's blessing that you are well again, if only you won't do too much. I think any day we may have a 'spurt' for Beatty *à la* January 24! The Germans coming out to lay a mass of mines would be their object, I think, with possibly a few minutes' bombardment off somewhere!

Yours in violent haste,

F.

...

132: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 25th, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

What you write about so few men breaking their leave is excellent testimony as to the state of your fleet! Your saying you get tired

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

shows you are going back to work too soon. However, the leopard can't change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin. You were bound to go back to work too soon! I told [Admiral of the Fleet, ret.] Sir A. May so!

I fear one of the German submarines is off to the Mediterranean to disturb Carden at the Dardanelles. Our absence of a complete blockade of the North Sea makes it very easy for them to elaborate all their arrangements for convoy and refuelling and replenishing with torpedoes. We really are stupid in our funk of neutrals! Our 5,000 mines don't stop the German submarines passing through Dover Straits, and yet their mines keep our submarines from molesting their Dreadnoughts passing from the Elbe to the Jähde [Jade]. The Germans take immense precautions, which is a conclusive proof that such an attack is feasible. There never was such a mistake as putting Keyes in charge of the submarines, who had not the faintest idea of how to employ them!¹ and, sadder still, that not the slightest improvement in our submarines in four years! You can ram a German submarine without any damage to it, and the gun they carry has proved its efficacy. Our submarine has to dive when it sees a German submarine! Briggs most to blame, I'm told, and then A. K. Wilson, and now A. K. W. is the chief prophet of the submarine! (The irony of fate, as they say!) Yesterday A. K. W. said to me that he didn't see any naval operations possible in view of the submarine!

Yours,

F.

I think de Chair's squadron has done its patrol work quite splendidly and I think they ought to be praised for it, in view of the awful weather they have had. Their success in stopping ships has been wonderful.

133: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 27th, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

The oil tanker torpedoed by the German submarine off Dover only has one of her numerous tanks full of water, and otherwise as

¹ Keyes had, in January, gone out as Chief of Staff to Vice-Admiral Carden.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

tight as a bottle! She has gone to the Thames by herself to be repaired. So we must engage oil tankers as transports for the troops. We must reckon on the *Derfflinger* and *Seydlitz* being able to come out in a pinch, even though their repairs may be unfinished. An American ship has been sunk by a German mine off Borkum, which I hope may have good results in America.

12,000 soldiers from Egypt join Carden on March 2nd, but no one can predict what the bombardment will do! Hidden guns on the heights may escape till the ships attempt to pass them. Myself I think it utter folly to publish a word about the bombardment, and more especially the names of ships, but it is all Foreign Office business and pressure from Russia and France. We are their facile dupes! The next two months enclose the crisis of the War! Let us keep our sea power secure!

In violent haste, Yours,

F.

Don't work too hard. Take a little more holiday. . . .

134: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 28th, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

At last I think I've hit on a 'SUBMARINE DESTROYER'¹! The keel is to be laid to-day and finished in three weeks and at work in Dover Straits. Cost of first vessel, £5,000! I won't tell you any more at present! I got it through yesterday in 20 minutes! It will make your mouth water and your sleep easy at Scapa! You shall have the second one. We shall build 50 to start with! (Everyone thinks I'm mad! *but I really am not!*) I have come to the conclusion yesterday that THE ONE most awful thing in war is the '*careful man*' (*d—n him!*), who won't take any risks and is bent on '*the gnat of perfection*'!

We seem to be getting on nicely in the Dardanelles, notwithstanding the awful vacillations of the War Council in having delayed

¹ These were Fisher's anti-submarine airships. Air-Marshal Sir Victor Goddard has published a fascinating account of Fisher's devotion to this project, and of how, on May 13th, he, 'architect of the Dreadnought Grand Fleet . . . as a last act was deliberately dedicating a group of young sailors to the Air' ('Secret and Hazardous', *The Pelican*, 1934. This is the private journal of the Royal Naval Staff College, Greenwich).

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

military co-operation, so our Bluejackets are now landing to do soldiers' work in demolition, etc. There is no one directing our public affairs who has '*the courage of a louse or the backbone of a slug*' (I've told you this before!), except Winston, whose courage is that of the Evil One!

Do take care of yourself.

Yours till Paradise,

Fisher

135: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

March 3rd, 1915

First Lord.

I concur in your proposal to remit this question [the projected attack upon Borkum] for careful study by Sir A. K. Wilson, with whom I have on many occasions discussed it in general terms. (*The whole problem depends on the efficiency of our arrangements for protection against submarines — an effective means of protection is not yet in sight.*)

This operation would necessarily await the trend of events in the Dardanelles. We must know what forces remain before embarking on a new undertaking.

We are now committed to the Dardanelles at all costs so must anyhow wait till middle of May, by which time events in Holland may quite change the position and indicate Terschelling as our base.

136: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

Admiralty, Whitehall

March 5th, 1915

Secret

I think about March 8th to March 20th the German Fleet may come out.

My dear Beatty,

... PRIVATE. I've had a big fight to get you Pakenham [to command the 2nd Battle Cruiser Squadron] — fierce endeavours in other directions. PAKENHAM IS A BRAVE MAN. Also Pakenham believes in you. *We must have officers who believe in their Admirals instead of*

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

back-biting them! But what can you expect when [Admiral of the Fleet, ret.] Sir Gerard Noel writes to the First Lord protesting against my being at the Admiralty and saying, 'God help the Navy'! We have laid down 187 new ships since November 15th (*four of them battle cruisers of 33 knots and 15-inch guns*) and ALL OF THEM WILL BE FIGHTING WITHIN A YEAR! God is helping the Navy!

Yours for always,

Fisher

137: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 8th, 1915

Dear Jellicoe,

... We want to borrow 20 good Midshipmen for temporary work till civilians are obtained and trained for use with airships bought and building. I suppose they had better be volunteers, as otherwise they may be physically incapable of standing dizzy heights, etc.! I asked the Second Sea Lord to write to you specially that we don't want 'duffers', or the coming 'venture' will be wrecked and better not do it at all!¹

I have not a moment to write more.

Yours,

F.

I cannot understand why the German High Sea Fleet should now at the present moment any more than at any time in the past hurl itself at our Fleet! *unless they are being goaded to it!* We have never seen anything official about von Ingenohl being superseded by von Pohl.² Our Minister at Copenhagen telegraphs that von Ingenohl has left Kiel for Cuxhaven. Why should they have superseded him?

P.S. You see how mischievous it is to publish dispatches. Mr.

¹ To Jellicoe on March 22nd, 1915 ('3.30 A.M.!!!'): 'The first of our squadron of light anti-submarine airships for work between Calais and Dover was completed day before yesterday in 18 DAYS FROM STARTING WORK! and has done over 40 miles an hour on her trial trip! Your Midshipmen are practising in her!'

² Admiral Hugo von Pohl, Chief of the German Admiralty Staff, had superseded Admiral von Ingenohl as Commander-in-Chief of the High Sea Fleet in February (-January 1916).

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

Pollen¹ writes to ask why *Tiger*, etc. did not continue the pursuit of the *Derfflinger* and *Seydlitz*, seen to be in flames and severely damaged, and *The Times* asks why Sturdee wasted the fine weather of the forenoon before attacking and so losing the *Dresden* in thick weather at 4 p.m.!

138: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

March 12th, 1915

. . . W. R. Hall² came to me last night with this idea: The German best battleships rush the Dover Straits (dropping mines behind them) and get [to] the Dardanelles and gobble up our ships *and then refuge at Constantinople!* Colliers *en route* arranged at Cartagena if necessary, *and Jellicoe PERFORCE more than 24 hours behind all the way!* Afterwards they (the Germans) gobble up the Russian Fleet in the Black Sea and bombard as convenient Odessa! Varna! Constantinople!!! etc., etc. . . .

MORAL. *Carden to press on!* and Kitchener to occupy the deserted forts at extremity of Gallipoli and mount howitzers there. . . .

139: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall

March 15th, 1915

BURN.

Dear Jellicoe,

How interesting your suggesting to me getting less costly vessels to take the place of destroyers in hunting submarines and doing convoy work, as 48 hours before your letter we had ordered a hundred 'glorified whalers' of 15 knots speed, with a gun and search-light and crew of 20 men, to be built in six weeks, I hope — mostly manned by Newfoundland fishermen now en route and Dundee whalers' crews.

Don't have any fear! The 18-inch gun cruiser will join you in 16

¹ Arthur H. Pollen, the naval journalist.

² Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) W. Reginald Hall, Director of the Intelligence Division, Admiralty War Staff, 1914-1918, in succession to Oliver.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

months' time — with four other battle cruisers of same speed, 32 knots, and 15-inch guns.

Things are going badly at the Dardanelles! We want military co-operation, as pointed out by me in January last, but it was ignored by everyone. Now we are held up for want of soldiers! This is 'a war of lost opportunities'! We have had to send out *Queen* and *Implacable* [pre-dreadnoughts] in response to Carden's urgent entreaty for more ships — *16 battleships now at Dardanelles!* . . . *U-51* and *U-52* are new submarines just gone to Heligoland. I believe there also is one off the coast of Spain en route to the Dardanelles, and *U-34*, now in Channel, may also be going there! Lemnos is quite protected against submarine attack — *a very smart bit of work!*

SECRET. It was 'touch and go' yesterday whether I did not go off to Dardanelles this morning, but it was decided otherwise.

We have only now 3 destroyers with Commodore (T) at Harwich! We have allowed daily Dutch steamers from Flushing to Folkestone to be resumed after having stopped them. Spies and German submarines will rejoice. I don't quite know who governs the Country! There are a whole lot of committees everywhere!

Yours,

F.

140: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 16th, 1915

Dear Jellicoe,

Our hundred new small craft are all ordered and of three classes:

1. Small whalers.
2. Big whalers.
3. £60,000 vessels —

more or less dictated to us by the capacity of unemployed shipbuilding facilities to proceed with the work at once, and the speeds vary from 13 to 17 knots. The small whaler costing £4,000 and only going 11 knots catches more whales than the big whaler of 15 knots, because ever so much more handy and turns on her heel, so in the whaling industry they've given up big whalers for small ones after an exhaustive trial. A submarine is '*very like a whale*'! (Shakespeare: *Hamlet*). Turn on her quick and harpoon her with a bomb!

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

It's quite true all you say about our lamentable deficiency in destroyers! The Commodore (T) has only three with him to-day. All the rest dispersed convoying transports and hunting submarines. If only the War lasts a year we shall be all right!

16 battleships now in Dardanelles and every day something being sent there! Yesterday *Phaeton* [light cruiser] and 18 mine-sweepers and *Reliance* [repair ship] and distilling vessels, etc., etc., etc.

Yours,

F.

Von Pohl has told his Fleet to keep '*in a state of advanced preparedness*' from to-day. We may not get warning next time. Why should he make any signals! He has all his Fleet at Schilling Roads now.

There has been complete stagnation since January 24. There's a 'time limit' to everything, even to stupidity! and anti-submarine First Sea Lords [A. K. Wilson]! We say it so often that it is '*the unexpected that happens*', and yet we don't act up to it by imagining what we should do in inconceivable happenings! Who expected Carden to be in command of a big fleet? He was made Admiral Superintendent of Malta to shelve him!

141: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 17th, 1915

Dear Jellicoe,

It is quite certain that some big event had been decided upon by German Fleet by the information we have had, *and it was as suddenly given up* and a large portion of Fleet now at once suddenly going to Baltic for exercises! What their programme was cannot be even guessed, but obviously everything was coming out and the plans were elaborate, as apparently all kinds of documents were circulated as to scheme of action. '*All's well that ends well*'! Possibly they may have been expecting something being done by us — one can't tell.

Carden on sick list for three or four weeks with 'atonic indigestion', whatever that may be, and de Robeck goes on in his stead as at present arranged.¹ Winston has gone to France for two or three days

¹ Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet, first Baronet) John M. de Robeck, Second-in-Command of the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron since January, replaced Carden as Commander-in-Chief, 1915-1916.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

for a change! Sir Ian Hamilton¹ arrives at the Dardanelles 6.30 p.m. to-night. He ought to have been sent out on February 19, but we are always 'too late'! The vacillations and delays are quite terrible and may yet be disastrous in their effects.

The *Orvieto* [minelayer] with 1,200 mines leaves to join you next Friday night . . . There are endless ways the *Orvieto* might be used in an encounter with the High Sea Fleet or any blocking operation.

Yours,

F.

142: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

March 20th, 1915

Dardanelles.

16 English Destroyers.

6 Torpedo Boats.

6 French Destroyers.

—

28

=

I count up 28 destroyers and torpedo boats at Dardanelles, and in view of the very narrow entrance of the Dardanelles and restricted area of operations this is infinitely a bigger proportion than we have at home; but all the same we ought to press the French to send more destroyers and more light cruisers. It's ridiculous what little the French do! And what good their keeping a force on the Syrian Coast? I have only one anxiety; the German and Austrian submarines — *when they appear the game will be up!* That's why I wish to press on the military co-operation and get a base at Cape Helles² anyhow. It will be three weeks before the military can do anything according to present arrangements.

¹ General Sir Ian Hamilton, commanding the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, 1915.

² Cape Helles, the south tip of the Gallipoli Peninsula, at the mouth of the Dardanelles.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

143: TO COMMODORE CHARLES DE BARTOLOMÉ¹

March 24th, 1915

Naval Secretary.

I fully agree with First Lord at end of his proposed telegram for you to hustle out to Lemnos, *but the rest of the telegram I am dead against! We ought to wait de Robeck's reply to telegram sent him last night.* Equinoc-tial gale now in full blast, so nothing could be done anyway, cer-tainly no flying! (*Vide* loss yesterday of a much needed torpedo boat wrecked at Lemnos, whose light draught of water so specially needed!)

I expect the First Lord wrote out his proposed telegram before receiving de Robeck's continuation of his yesterday's telegram which I have only just this moment seen. When we get de Robeck's reply, which certainly we ought to wait for, I have another form of words which I think will meet the pressing requirements of the case.

You cannot over-ride the authorities on the spot after having been so specially selected without sending out an envoy like yourself to explain more than is possible in any telegram — all the complexities of the case and need for urgency — you'll get there in 80 hours!

F.

I'm not sure a fast vessel from Toulon to Malta would not hasten your passage.

Admiralty, Whitehall

Proposed telegram to de Robeck

Commodore de Bartolomé will be with you Saturday morning to explain details not possible to discuss adequately in telegrams and liable to misconception (stop)

¹ The essential background: de Robeck had telegraphed on March 23rd (Telegram No. 818) proposing a delay until the middle of April, when the Army would be in a position to participate in a combined attack. Churchill read the telegram 'with consternation'. He saw danger in the long delay and 'feared still more the immense and incalculable extension of the enterprise involved in making a military attack on a large scale. The mere process of landing an army after giving the enemy at least three weeks' additional notice seemed to me to be a most terrible and formidable hazard. It appeared to me at the time a far graver matter in every way than the naval attack'. He could see no justification for giving up the naval plan. At an Admiralty War Group meeting on March 23rd Churchill proposed to send de Robeck a telegram ordering a renewal of the naval attack begun on March 18th 'at the first favourable opportunity'. Bartolomé would be sent out with the details of the operation. Oliver and Bartolomé were prepared to go along with this telegram, but not Fisher, Wilson, or Jackson. (Admiral [afterwards Admiral of the Fleet] Sir Henry Jackson had been at the Admiralty since the outbreak of war for special duties.) Asquith and Balfour, however, supported Churchill. Fisher was actually delighted that the operation was, at long last, assuming the form he had advocated from the start. The text of the telegram following the letter is an alternative to the First Lord's prepared by Fisher. See *The World Crisis*, II, 232-5, which includes the texts of de Robeck's telegram and Churchill's proposed reply.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

When gale ceases the air reconnaissance by Cmdr Samson should be instantly pressed forward (stop)

There are positions where drifting mines will not affect the bombarding ships and careful deliberate bombardment of the forts should be maintained if aeroplanes are effective in spotting (stop)

This continuous slow methodical destruction of the forts will greatly facilitate military operation which it is hoped may be commenced at an earlier period than stated by Sir Ian Hamilton (stop)

It is important to keep the enemy under the impression that there is no compulsory delay in the operations.

144: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 24th, 1915

First Lord.

Although the telegram goes from you personally, the fact of my remaining at the Admiralty sanctions my connection with it, so if it goes I do not see how I can remain.¹

F.

145: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 24th, 1915

BURN.

Dear Jellicoe,

I've not had time to study your letter on *U-29*, BUT YOU HAD INDEED A PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPE!!!² But were you not cruising in most

¹ Fisher is referring to the telegram eventually sent by Churchill at 7.35 p.m., March 24th, after withdrawing his original telegram to de Robeck. 'I had to content myself with sending a reasoned telegram which, while giving him the strongest possible lead, left the decision still in the Admiral's hands.' Fisher was pressed into agreeing with this telegram, then tried to hearten the First Lord. '*You are very wrong to worry and excite yourself. Do try and remember that we are the lost ten tribes of Israel. We are sure to win!!! I know I am an optimist! Always have been!! Thank God. . . . Hustle Bartolomé! Send no more telegrams! Let it alone!*' See *ibid.*, II, 235-7, for the details.

² The *Dreadnought* had sunk *U-29* on March 18th - by crashing over her - as the 4th Battle Squadron was en route to Cromarty, following tactical exercises east of Scapa. Every man went down with the *U-29*, including her commander, Captain Weddigen, who in the *U-9* had torpedoed the three 'Cressys' in September 1914.

dangerous areas? You seem to have been on two well-known lines of approach of German submarines — Orkneys to Lindesnaes¹ and near Horns Reef to Aberdeen. This we know from experience, these routes of German submarines. Did you not know *U-29* had sunk *Atalanta* [steamship] off north of Ireland [March 14th] and so obviously was making her way home by the north of Scotland? *and you had no destroyers with you!!!* and apparently only 2 light cruisers! Your destroyers seem to have been at Rosyth and Scapa, except 6 in Irish Channel. *What a bad 'look out' in Neptune!* These are very rough criticisms. I may be wrong!

You MUST write frequently to Winston. He LOVES it and he HATES your writing to me, so I never can quote your views now! You must press on him in your private letter the vital importance of leaving loss of *U-29* a MYSTERY! *We are not yet SURE she is lost!*

Things are not promising in the Dardanelles, but it does not do to mope or repine! I AM AN OPTIMIST! A vituperative woman once called me a 'sun dial'!

'There he stands amongst the flowers
Counting only sunny hours
Heeding neither rain nor mist
The brazen-faced old optimist.'

Yours for ever,

F.

146: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 25th, 1915

Dear Jellicoe,

No time to write to you to-day. *Don't fail to write to First Lord, as Bartolomé tells me he much wishes for your letters.*

I fear that no one but myself at Admiralty at all appreciates that von Pohl may make a dash of some sort with all his force and perhaps a mass of troops, in view of the known fact that transports for the purpose are absolutely ready, and so are there more than sufficient troops massed in the neighbourhood of Hamburg and

¹ Lindesnaes is a cape on the southern extremity of Norway, at the entrance to the Skagerrak.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

Bremen, and I don't see what is to prevent their landing at Harwich and in the Thames, as we have no force at all in the south, and as the German transports would be grounded,¹ the English submarines would be ineffective. And you can't get down under 36 hours (I don't believe) because of the necessary detour and the Germans putting down masses of mines behind them, intending to return via Ireland, if they sacrifice their landed army of 200,000 men!

The Humber defences, outer and inner, now complete (I believe) and we have nothing there! THE REAL STRATEGIC CENTRE! and you won't agree to Beatty going there! Such is life!

Yours in haste,

F.

The Germans fully believe that the 3 dummy ships sent out to Lemnos are 3 battle cruisers! This news comes from Berlin! and may further incite von Pohl to come out!

147: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 26th, 1915

My beloved Jellicoe,

Big events in the last few hours *politically*! It seems almost certain that almost immediately Holland's neutrality will be at an end, through German pressure, and Holland will join us. She will be surely overrun by Germany up to the inundations, and so Germany will get an immense new area for getting provisions and sinews of war, and also more to bargain with when peace is considered! The English troops will, I expect, land at Hook of Holland. Flushing can be cut off by the Germans, so she will have Antwerp free as a submarine base, etc., etc.

I expect we shall establish our submarine and destroyer base at Terschelling, as being the nearest place to the German frontier that will not be commanded by German guns from the mainland. I suppose the German Fleet is likely to come out. In that case I suppose you would come to some suitable rendezvous to intercept their return to the Elbe, etc. It is known that by means of a multitude of motor trolleys (*now massed all along the Dutch frontier*) that the

¹ Owing to the shallowness of the water along the Essex coast.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

Germans can overrun Holland in a few hours. They, the Germans, have petrol depots along the whole frontier. IF ONLY the War Council had adopted the Admiralty urgent entreaty for the British Army to advance along the Belgian coast to the Dutch frontier, protected by the British Fleet, we should have had Antwerp!¹

We have lost IMMENSELY at Neuve Chapelle [March 10th-13th] for next to nothing and 840 officers! The military conduct of the War has been appallingly disastrous. There is no general and Joffre is a mediocrity, who only 'nibbles', to use his own expression.

Against our will we are FORCED to send destroyers and submarines to the Dardanelles. We can't help ourselves! '*Facilis descensus averni*', and the 3 monitors, invaluable in the Zuyder Zee, are now at Malta en route to the Danube.²

Yours always,

F.

148: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

March 27th, 1915

Secret

With reference to the Private and Personal telegram sent this forenoon (March 27th) by the First Lord to Vice-Admiral de Robeck (copy enclosed), stating that an official telegram from the Admiralty would be sent him approving his proposed action as conveyed in his private telegram to the First Lord (copy enclosed),³ my decided opinion is that before any such action the Admiralty should have before them the report to the War Office of Sir Ian Hamilton as to

¹ But 'even now at the 11th hour it would be a wise project for the British Army (re-inforced) to advance along the Belgian Coast to the Dutch Frontier and so close Antwerp' (Fisher to Churchill, March 26th, 1915).

² '*We pay a heavy price for producing a big political effect!* But without doubt the Dardanelles has brought the Balkan states to our side, and I believe they will very shortly join us, when we have *done all the fighting!*' (Fisher to Beatty, March 26th, 1915).

³ De Robeck's telegram of March 25th began: 'In preparing the decisive effort in conjunction with Army . . . it is proposed to resume a vigorous offensive as soon as weather permits, having following objects': clearance of the Kephez minefield, destruction of concealed Turkish guns, and an attack on the Chanak forts. 'I still hoped', Churchill has commented, 'that the continuance of the naval pressure, even within the limits now prescribed, would yield results which would encourage the Admiral to renew his attack, and thus spare the Army the dreaded ordeal' (*The World Crisis*, II, 251). On March 27th Churchill telegraphed his approval; but de Robeck, absorbed in the preparations for the joint attack, did not proceed with the limited operations outlined in his telegram of the 25th. See *ibid.*, II, 251-2. It is interesting to note that Churchill does not refer in *The World Crisis* to any of the four important Fisher communications of March 27th-31st (Nos. 148, 150, 152, 153).

his proposed future action, together with the remarks thereon of the War Office as to the likelihood of the proposed military operations (in co-operation with the Fleet) being so favourable as to justify the very considerable naval losses that may ensue.

Such justifiable losses for so great a political prize as Constantinople might possibly at the same time jeopardize our desired large margin of superiority over the German Navy in the decisive theatre — observing that the dispatch of submarines and destroyers from England to-day to the Dardanelles, together with those detained there on passage home, is a serious diminution of our required force in home waters; and that also, in all directions, such as aircraft, nets, monitors, repair ship and light cruisers, our home resources are being heavily drawn upon by the Dardanelles operations, but perhaps most especially in the amount of ammunition and wear of the big guns.

It is only right, therefore, that at this critical stage, before the final plunge is taken and now that Sir Ian Hamilton has himself carefully surveyed the whole scene of operations and been in close consultation on the spot with Vice-Admiral de Robeck and his Officers, we should be very fully informed by him of his considered opinion of all the probabilities of the military operations he has in prospect; and we ought to know also whether the War Office concur.

There have been signs of activity in the German High Sea Fleet, notably since the appointment of the new Commander-in-Chief, von Pohl, that indicate more vigorous action than has hitherto occurred, and quite likely our large detachment of the British naval force to the Dardanelles may lead to the German Fleet undertaking, in conjunction with the seizure of Holland by the German Army, some big sea operation. The sudden hostile German attitude towards Holland, together with the submarine attack on five Dutch ships in the last few days, opens up possibilities of our requiring all our margin of Naval Force to operate on the Dutch Coast and in the North Sea.

We cannot lessen the strength of Sir John Jellicoe's command, some of whose much wanted light cruisers and destroyers we have been reluctantly compelled to withdraw for other services, so that his Fleet is not so well equipped as could be wished in these respects. Therefore there should be a very strong assurance of success in the Dardanelles project to justify the risks we run by this depletion of our strength in the decisive theatre of the war.

Vice-Admiral de Robeck is very explicit in pointing out that our bombardment has not disabled more than one of the Turkish guns;

nor will our passage through the Narrows be effective unless the military operations give us the possession of the whole of the Gallipoli Peninsula. Also, he expresses his anxiety as to any further considerable use of the big guns of the old ships.

We have also to consider the arrival of hostile submarines when the troops may yet be in the transports and the Fleet not yet past the Narrows!

It must be added that the battle cruiser *Inflexible* has been badly damaged at the Dardanelles, necessitating her being convoyed to Malta for repair, and that the *Queen Elizabeth* is dependent on one engine, so is a cause of anxiety until repaired. And we have lost two battleships, and the battleships *Lord Nelson* and *Agamemnon* are requiring repair. We have sixteen battleships now at the Dardanelles.

The appointment of Herr Kühlmann as the new German Minister at The Hague is of itself a most significant and sinister act, and, taken in conjunction with the expressed desire of the German Military Staff for the termination of Dutch neutrality, makes very probable some big German operation requiring all our force in the decisive theatre.

F.

149: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 28th, 1915

Dear Jellicoe,

We had a meeting last night, Lord Kitchener, Sir E. Grey, First Lord and myself, and the Dutch question not so imminent as was thought early in the day, so the situation is easier. But it is reported that German General Staff are intent on forcing Holland one way or the other — they don't seem to mind which! The Germans have captured 5 Dutch ships, the last one with oranges, which they sunk! Nothing contraband in oranges!

We also discussed the Dardanelles, which is getting more serious than they think, but I protested from the very first, but the Cabinet were persuaded into it by Balfour and the First Lord, and it was made a purely political question.

I have not time to write more. I'm glad you've written to the First Lord, as it so pleases him. It makes no difference at all your

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

seeing him without me. I keep ready to resign at any moment. I had to do it two days ago, but *please don't mention it and* BURN this. Kitchener keeps telling me I *must* stop [i.e. stay]!

Yours in haste,

F.

150: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 28th, 1915

Secret

First Lord.

I noticed some indications in the secret papers (after seeing you last night) that something big may be brewing after March 29th, and it may well be very serious when taken in conjunction with the recent very sudden and quite unexpected hostile German attitude towards Holland. Then there is the appointment of Kühlmann to The Hague as German Minister; also the reported intention of the German General Staff to press for an immediate termination of Dutch neutrality; then the deliberate and apparently premeditated seizure of five Dutch ships in the last few days, and, above all, the sinking of the Dutch ship *Medea* when laden only with oranges and her Dutch nationality proved by her papers to be undoubted; and also, as you have so clearly pointed out in your own paper (read by Lord Kitchener and Sir E. Grey last evening), all favours your view that immense benefit will accrue to Germany by Holland being forced out of her neutrality at this special moment, when Germany has a great number of troops available — and can strike at once and get five-sixths of Holland and also Antwerp and the Scheldt.

All this naturally reacts on the Dardanelles business. We have, or shall have, sixteen destroyers there that are very badly wanted indeed at home; the three monitors have gone; the *Reliance* (new repair ship); so also the *Adamant* [submarine depot ship] and three submarines, besides the Australian new submarine detained out there; also all sorts of home resources largely drawn on — e.g., Samson and his aircraft; nets; mine-sweepers, etc., etc.; and finally, the chief anxiety of all — the large expenditure of big-gun ammunition, and, as pointed out by de Robeck, the serious anxiety as to the continuing efficiency of the big guns in the old ships. They will be certainly all worn out. The *Inflexible hors de combat* and about to be towed to

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

Malta. The *Elizabeth* with only one engine (and so always a cause of anxiety), the *Ocean* and *Irresistible* sunk, and *Lord Nelson* and *Agamemnon* requiring repair.

If the Germans decide (as well they may) — influenced largely no doubt by our having so large a force away from the decisive theatre — on some big thing at home, there is (you must admit) much cause for anxiety, especially with the German and Austrian submarine menace to the yet unlanded troops and our Dardanelles Fleet.

What is Ian Hamilton's report as to probable success? Admiral de Robeck does not look forward to disabling the Turkish guns.

Is the capture of the Gallipoli Peninsula going to be a siege? We should have the military opinion on this.

Is Ian Hamilton assured of the sufficiency of his force?

We know Admiral de Robeck to be a brave man, and he talks assuredly; but his assurance is really based on military co-operation and especially on the demolition of all the guns, thus assuring him of his safe communication with the sea and the safe passage of his store-ships, colliers, and ammunition supplies.

I prepared a formal memorandum on the whole subject last night, which I attach.¹

F.

P.S. I am not blind to the political necessity of going forward with the task, but before going further forward let the whole situation be so fully examined that success is assured while safety in the decisive theatre is not compromised.

151: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 29th, 1915

My beloved Jellicoe,

Your dear wife and Mrs. Madden lunch here to-morrow, so we shall be able to cross-examine as to your health, and Madden's also!

On March 31st is full moon — the night as clear as the day. The masses of transports known to be quite ready at Hamburg and Bremen for the purpose could convey the German Army of any

¹ This memorandum is No. 148. Admiral Bacon (*Fisher*, II, 222-3) confuses material from Fisher's memorandum of March 27th with Fisher's covering letter of the 28th.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

required size to the North Sea Canal. This Canal from the sea to Amsterdam is 15 miles long and admits ships of 30 feet draught, 720 feet length, and 78 feet beam, and they could then land on the sea side of the Dutch inundations, while the other German armies mopped up the rest of Holland on the other side of the inundations, and this complete annexation of Holland would preclude us from having the desired submarine base at Terschelling or elsewhere on the Dutch coast, and would also give the Scheldt and Antwerp, with its submarine-building and repairing yard at Hoboken [Belgium] to Germany, and verily would then be Napoleon's pistol at the head of England, the German High Sea Fleet at the same time following the track of the Flushing boat which runs daily, carrying German spies to and fro (stopped by the Admiralty but put on again by the Board of Trade!). The German Fleet would bombard Harwich and Portsmouth and return to its Zareba undeterred by the British Fleet, unable to intervene because of mines and submarines and insufficiency of time to reach the German Fleet before it is again in its Zareba! There is no force south to stop it — 16 destroyers that ought to be there at the Dardanelles and 16 battleships, besides 2 sunk, and Herr Kühlmann, the new German Minister at The Hague, to see it all through, and the German Military Staff insisting on the immediate annulling of Dutch neutrality, as they have the troops now available to 'pinch' Holland (750,000 German troops unoccupied!). There's a fantasy for you! What a time the Press Bureau would have of it, and *the Admiralty also!*

Yours for evermore,

F.

152: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
March 31st, 1915

SECRET

First Lord.

There is but little doubt now in my mind that the German authorities in coming out with their Fleet yesterday were putting to the test whether our two previous contacts with them on January 24th and at Christmas were simply pure coincidences. Some 'careless word' had reached them that they were not coincidences, so they

put the matter to the test yesterday! The sudden volume of wireless confirmed their suspicions, and the instantaneous return of our ships to their respective bases at Scapa, Rosyth, and Cromarty confirmed still further! If not the wireless, then the German spies, because of general semaphore signals, had the news in time also!

Providence has given us the proverbial three chances and we have failed!

I. At Christmas the battle was joined and the guns were firing, but mental paralysis seized on the Commodore and we lost the Germans in the mist!

II. On January 24th one Admiral also was seized with mental paralysis, and one Captain fired at the wrong ship continuously, and so the *Moltke* just did target practice on the *Lion*, and the *Lion* being disabled, the German force escaped total annihilation. The *Seydlitz* still has masses of men on her repairing her, and the *Derfflinger* could not have fired another shot, as her magazines were flooded, owing to the intense fire raging on board her.

III. And now this last time we have lost, as we had become callous — such volumes of wireless emanating from everywhere that it not only gave the notice, but it jammed the German wireless, and the semaphore signals told the German spies in time, supposing the wireless did not.

So we have to face some further cunning move. There will be another conclusive test! They will make all the preparations and all the signals and won't go out! *We shall!* After that we shall live in the dark! From moment to moment in expectation and extreme tension!

Also this accentuates the drain — the daily drain — on our resources of the Dardanelles operations! Those 24 destroyers ought to be at home (so grievously wanted), the *Adamant*, and the four submarines of the E class (we want more submarines badly in the Baltic), the 18 battleships (two sunk), which are not surplus ships if the dire chances of war are considered. May we not have more mental paralysis not only in the actors but in the directors! A wrong deployment of the Fleet or a stupid Admiralty mistake like the *Hogue*, the *Cressy*, and the *Aboukir*, or two more *Goeben* Admirals! and where is our margin? And it is true, there are possible circumstances when the individual superiority of our ships may not be of service.

I think all the Dardanelles plans should be fully considered before the final plunge is made. I admit fully the great political policy. I

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

beg you to forward my memorandum on the Dardanelles with its accompanying letter and this communication also to the War Council before the deliberation takes place. I attach copies of the letter and memorandum.¹

F.

153: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

March 31st, 1915²

Secret

First Lord.

With the departure of the last batch of reinforcements of destroyers, submarines, fleet-sweepers, etc., for the Dardanelles, we have reached a point when the general situation must be carefully reviewed, more especially with regard to the margin of superiority over the German Fleets which we retain in Home Waters — at *their* selected moment.

In my view, there are many indications — of which the recent cruise of the German Fleet is an example — that under their new Commander-in-Chief we may anticipate a more forward and aggressive policy in the North Sea, and therefore we must be prepared for all eventualities.

I consider that we have now descended to the bare minimum of superiority in Home Waters, and that to dispatch any more fighting ships of any kind to the Dardanelles operations would be to court serious losses at home.

We have been fortunate of late in that we have had no submarine losses of moment in the North Sea, but danger is always present, and a turn of the wheel may give the enemy chances of attrition which he will take. We have been very near it at least once recently.

In addition, the position in Holland appears to be far from stable, and the inclusion of Holland amongst the belligerents, whether for or against us, would necessitate extended operations at home from which we could ill spare even the force at present at the Dardanelles.

Consequently, I desire now to state my definite opinion that we must stand or fall by the ships now out in the Mediterranean or on

¹ There is no evidence that any of this material, nor No. 153, was circulated to the War Council, despite the Admiral's specific requests.

² There is some question about the date of this memorandum. Crease gives it as '2 April'.

their way there. If the concerted operations about to be undertaken are not successful, and we incur heavy losses either of great or small ships, we cannot afford to send any more from Home Waters to complete the work. Not even if by sending reinforcements there is a possibility, even a certainty, that the operations will then be successful and with only further small losses — nor even if more Naval force is required to extricate our Army.

Further, if loss be sustained in the North Sea while the Dardanelles operations are still in suspense, or if some new development decreases our margin of safety in the North Sea below the present minimum level, we must be free to recall at once ships from the Mediterranean to make good the deficiency.

I therefore urge that, before the final plunge is taken and the troops are landed, the Dardanelles operations should again be carefully examined from this standpoint by the War Council. We should have before us the considered report of Sir Ian Hamilton, with the remarks of the Army Council thereon; we should reconsider the position in view of the lack of damage hitherto done to the guns in the forts by previous bombardments; we should consider the possible arrival of enemy submarines; and, in a word, all the factors which might result in the next operation being indecisive or unsuccessful so as to call for greater Naval force.

It is admitted that the advantage, political and moral, of the forcing of the Dardanelles and the occupation of Constantinople will be enormous, and such as to warrant great losses. But, in my opinion, no success in this region will render it justifiable to reduce — momentarily even — our superiority in the decisive theatre beyond the minimum which has now been reached. I am prepared to risk the probable heavy losses in the ships and personnel now at the Dardanelles, in order to achieve success, but not to decrease further our available force at home in any class of fighting ship.

Since the original decision to proceed with these operations, I have been anxious that a sufficient force should be provided to enable them to be carried through, and have proposed reinforcements of several types of ships that have actually been sent, and concurred in others. *But I consider that the definite limit has now been reached.* In any event, most of the battleships at the Dardanelles are lost to us for a long time, because they will require repairs, refit, and a change of guns when the operations terminate, while for the oldest we shall certainly be short of ammunition.

We can recover from an indecisive or even an unsuccessful result

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

of these operations in the Dardanelles; we can recover from an abandonment of the operations if this should be necessary; but we could never recover from a reverse to our Main Fleets in the decisive theatre at home. *It would be ruin.* Our existence depends on our unchallengeable *Naval supremacy.*

I therefore beg you to forward my previous memorandum with its accompanying letter, and this communication also, to the War Council, in order that immediate deliberation may take place. I attach copies of that letter and memorandum.

154: TO LORD RANKSBOROUGH

March 31st, 1915

My beloved Friend,

I hate 'Louisa' not letting you lunch here, as I had a really lovely Duchess (for *you* to *charm*) to sit by your side.

Someone asked the Dean (*who lives in Heaven*) what number the Kaiser had on his motor car — 2 L!! and what the Crown Prince — 2L2!! *He couldn't see it!*

Yours till Paradise,

F.

155: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

29, Sussex Square
Hyde Park, W.
[April 1915?]

Secret

My dear Jellicoe,

I imagine you are going to be asked by Cabinet orders what is your opinion as to so mining the German Fleet into its anchorages that it can't get out into the North Sea without giving the warning signal of clearing the approaches of mines — just precisely similar to Admiral Togo putting mines down off Port Arthur, which the Russians had to clear away before going out, and so giving Togo warning, whose base was many hundreds of miles away, as you know. As fast as the Russians cleared the channel, then Togo next night put fresh ones down and so kept the Russians busy! Togo thus laid down *many*,

many thousands of mines, I can't now remember how many. Kitchener and others, and I am very strongly of their opinion, also more especially Hankey (who has the genius of Napoleon and the thoroughness of Cromwell), are intensely in favour of Togo's tactics now against the German Fleet; but the majority of the Cabinet are against it, but it may ultimately at to-day's meeting be left to be decided by you, which is why I am writing this with the following facts:

I. We are sending every living soul we can to our Army in France, and quite rightly, hence England is denuded of troops against even a big raid.

II. The military situation between the Germans and Allies is approaching stalemate, and this is the opportunity for the Germans making a *coup* with their whole naval resources — the Fleet and 150,000 men in transports, which are all known to be perfectly ready, both the soldiers and the transports. They also have a numerous flock of old vessels filled with cement to sink in the channel left open by our mines, and so block our Southern naval force from coming through into the North Sea. The two German words used I forget, but they mean '*Let every d—d thing go in!*' Kitchener told us at Defence meeting a few days ago that as a purely military movement the Germans would and should do this the moment 'stalemate' developed in regard to military operations.

III. Mr. Gerard, the American Ambassador at Berlin [1913-1917], a few days ago sent his niece over to England and told her very secretly to let someone know that he thought the Germans were contemplating some big *coup* shortly against England; that some big work has been in progress to that intent in the German Fleet in the way of armament — he does not know what — but a large number of ships were in dockyard hands and a very large number of German naval officers were in Berlin on leave, and the young lady saw them herself. I have an idea they have been putting big howitzers on board on temporary mountings. Mr. Gerard also heard that the destroyers were having bigger guns put in them.

That, shortly, is the case for laying down mines at once to block in the German Fleet so that they shall give ample notice of their coming out.

I've written this in frightful haste and don't want to influence your judgment, only to let you know what is going on.

Yours,

F.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

156: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

April 2nd, 1915

Let us hope that the Dardanelles will be passed and over by the desired date to your honour and glory, and that the Bulgarians . . . will be . . . the first in . . . so getting Salonika and Kavalla and Macedonia generally as their reward! I EARNESTLY HOPE THIS MAY RESULT!¹ Had the Greeks come in all would have been well without doubt. (Did you see that a Bulgarian General strongly urged an alternative disembarking place for our troops? *Does Kitchener know?*)

We can't send another rope yarn even to de Robeck! WE HAVE GONE TO THE VERY LIMIT!!! And so they must not hustle and should be distinctly and most emphatically told that no further reinforcements of the Fleet can be looked for! *A failure or check in the Dardanelles would be nothing. A failure in the North Sea would be ruin.* But I do not wish to be pessimistic, and let us hope that Gallipoli ain't going to be Plevna, or that de Robeck will be 'Duckworthed'.²

157: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
[April 2nd, 1915]

BURN.

Dear Jellicoe,

Forgive haste and pencil. *This Dardanelles entirely exhausts my time.* (I will send you a bit from Mahan so apropos!)

I wish I could share your idea that the German Fleet only came out for exercise and scuttled back before midnight! The 2nd Battle Squadron was hustled from the Baltic (where they WERE exercising)

¹ 'I told Sir E. Grey over and over again he could get the Bulgarians to march on Constantinople from Dedeagatch if he was authorized to give them Kavalla, Salonika and Macedonia and therefore dish the Greeks' (undated Fisher minute [early March 1915?]) to Crease, cited in Admiral Sir William James: *The Eyes of the Navy: a Biographical Study of Admiral Sir Reginald Hall* [London, 1955], p. 61).

² The Russian advance on Constantinople, in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, had been held up for nearly five months by the stubborn Turkish defence at Plevna in the Balkan Mountains (July-December 1877). In 1807 a British squadron, under Admiral Sir John Duckworth, had forced the Dardanelles without difficulty and anchored not far from Constantinople; but it had prudently repassed the Straits some ten days later, when the Turks began to strengthen their defences. 'This episode is frequently cited as an example of the futility of forcing the Straits. The facts show clearly that it had no relation whatever to modern conditions either in regard to the difficulties of the passage up or down or to the consequences attendant upon success' (*The World Crisis*, II, 303 n.).

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

and not allowed to remain three days longer, as asked by its Admiral, and on return have gone back again to Kiel, I believe. Also, the *Pillau*, a new cruiser, was denied the same request. They have always hitherto gone to Kiel for tactics, etc. Also, since Memel, 'March 29' has been fixed for 'something'. All these things have to be pieced together to produce conviction. No, I'm sure it was the outburst of wireless and very likely Bradford's MOST INEXCUSABLE general semaphore that told them they were found out, so they scuttled home, but alas! that may not be the worst of it. A trap will now be laid, to make sure. They won't come out when our information tells us, and lay out submarines and mines instead! and many other dreadful alternatives also present themselves. . . .

Yours,

F.

158: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 2nd, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

I think you wrote to me about Heath.¹ I really endeavour to interfere as little as possible in these appointments, as they are absolutely in First Lord's province and he has Bartolomé; but if my opinion is asked, I think it is exceeding wrong to take any Admiral Superintendent of a dockyard away in such times as these. Everyone ought to work out the job he is in during the War, and as few changes as possible anywhere and everywhere, but more especially in Admirals afloat and in Captains of battleships and battle cruisers.

. . .

Yours,

F.

¹ Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Herbert L. Heath, Admiral Superintendent of Portsmouth dockyard, 1912-1915, took over the command of the 7th Cruiser Squadron (renamed 2nd Cruiser Squadron) in October 1915 (-1916).

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

159: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
[ca. April 3rd, 1915]

BURN.

My dear Jellicoe,

Our Consul-General at New York¹ (*who has so far never failed us*) keeps on telling us of his continued fears that the 21 armed German liners in New York will escape. His spies tell him of unwonted activities. We can't catch them. Our 'Glasgow' class no use in the heavy seas for which these big liners are specially built! As A. K. Wilson truly says, the only ship to deal with them is a battle cruiser! but you would collapse at once if we sent the *Invincible* or *Indomitable*! It will be a nice kettle of fish if those 21 ships (that carry such immense cargoes of coal now as rearranged) get loose all over the world!

Cambon, the French Ambassador, rushed over yesterday with apparently excellent authority that Holland any moment may be driven out of her neutrality, and those d—d Dardanelles have got all the vessels we want for Texel, etc., etc. (24 destroyers that we so want, anyhow!).²

The Germans have now got their 'directive' arrangement in working order for spotting our wireless, so they will know you exactly. They tell me of wonderful new facts coming along about wireless—probably as easy to tell a particular ship's wireless as a particular man's voice on the telephone; but I presume more the fingering of the operator than anything else. However, I speak at random. I don't know.

I suppose you have a very high opinion of Warrender and Bradford, or you would not cling to them. I have no reason for making this remark beyond that they both seem somewhat stupid! We all have our own methods. I can't stand a fool, however amiable, as I don't believe that in war it is anything short of criminal to keep the wrong man in any appointment, high or low. 'Changing horses while crossing the stream' is an overdone saying! Anyhow, they changed von Ingenohl and put in von Pohl! *That was a big order!*

Heaven bless you. *Burn* this. Don't be downhearted!

Yours,

F.

¹ Sir Courtenay Bennett, British Consul-General at New York, 1907-1915.

² To Churchill on April 5th: 'I do not think you are sufficiently impressed by Cambon's warning as to Holland! *We ought to have every detail organized to move in a moment to Texel.* You are just simply eaten up with the Dardanelles and cannot think of anything else! Damn the Dardanelles! They will be our grave!' (*The World Crisis*, II, 303). Paul Cambon was the brilliant French Ambassador at London, 1898-1920.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

160: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall

April 4th, 1915

BURN.

My dear Jellicoe,

I have time for little else now but increasing anxiety over the Dardanelles situation. I know so very little of de Robeck and Ian Hamilton that I am not able to rely on their judgment, and Keyes is very shallow and has not shined so far! No good purpose would be served by my resigning. My opinions are known. But the politicians took the bit between their teeth and decided it was a Cabinet and not an 'expert' question, and Kitchener unwittingly led on by thinking it was going to be a purely naval operation, which Carden undoubtedly said but I never agreed to, and so here we are!

Patey thinks he is going to be 'von-Spee'd' by a raid of fast German cruisers from the North Sea coming out to set free all the armed German ships in New York harbour, acting in conjunction with proposed attempted escape of *Eitel Friedrich* [armed merchant cruiser] from Newport News! Certainly, our Consul-General at New York keeps on telegraphing there is unwonted activity amongst all these Germans at New York and no American difficulties in the way of their coming out! Patey is the one and only person who long before predicted the arrival of von Spee at the Falklands, and he also *correctly* said where the *Dresden* was, so he seems to have a head on his shoulders! He has now intrenched himself at Bermuda!¹

I haven't time for a word more! It's no use being downhearted! Sir E. Grey has gone trout-fishing and the Prime Minister gone to the country!

Yours,

F.

... Apparently Tottenham is the favourite for Weymouth's place.² He is a very able man, so all say. He was a Captain under me for three years and I thought very highly of him.

¹ Patey had assumed command of the North American and West Indies Station in March (-1916). As Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Fleet, he had participated in the hunt for von Spee's squadron and later had operated in South Atlantic waters in the search for the *Dresden*. (She was sunk by H.M.S. *Glasgow* on March 14th, 1915.)

² Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Henry L. Tottenham, commanding the Irish Coast Patrol (11th Cruiser Squadron), succeeded Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Arthur W. Weymouth in the command of the 7th Cruiser Squadron in April (-October).

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

161: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 6th, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

We have got a lovely plan, we think, for a trap for von Pohl sending out his battle cruisers into our 'E' class submarines, by Haddock Fleet¹ being a decoy off Stavanger and be[ing] protected by a flotilla of 'C' class submarines surrounding him and going with him there and back. I had an hour with Haddock yesterday. He is simply incomparable. Please make much of him when he comes to Scapa next week. He deserves it. We are elaborating the plan. You can veto it if you like.

We had frantic news of the 21 Germans breaking out of New York yesterday owing to Patey taking all the watching cruisers down to *Eitel Friedrich*, who never meant to do anything else but be interned and give us trouble and worry with watching cruisers! and it has succeeded. But so far the 21 Germans have not broken out.

You don't seem, from enquiries I've made, to have distinctly said anything against Grant or Tottenham *when in the first place* their names were mentioned. Your only point THEN was they were both senior to Calthorpe!² This is only what I gather! But please understand that neither now, nor when I was six years First Sea Lord, did I ever intervene between the First Lord and his Private Secretary in flag appointments. I think the only real bargain I ever made was with the present First Lord in October 1911, that he would advance you to be Admiralissimo in case of war, and he has kept his word against immense and universal opposition both in the Fleet and in the Cabinet, and only yesterday he acknowledged to me most impressively that I was right in my judgment of you and in extracting the promise he gave me! (for otherwise I refused to have anything whatever to do with him, although McKenna entreated me.)

No time for more. I am *over busy*!

Yours always,

F.

...

¹ Herbert J. Haddock, Commodore 2nd Class, R.N.R. (of the White Star Line in peacetime), commanded a fleet of dummy wooden dreadnoughts and battle cruisers. '... if ever there was a Nelson of the Merchant Service he was.' (See *Memories*, pp. 144-5.)

² Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet Sir) the Hon. Somerset A. Gough-Calthorpe, commanding the 2nd Cruiser Squadron, 1914-1916; Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) William Lowther Grant had taken over the 3rd Cruiser Squadron in March.

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 8th, 1915

First Sea Lord.

We wish to ask you to reassure us on certain points connected with the conduct of the war.

We will start from ground on which there is common agreement, viz: That the Grand Fleet should always be in such a position, and of such strength, that it can be at all times ready to meet the entire fleet of the enemy with confident assurance as to the result.

Is it quite certain that we are not putting that assurance in jeopardy?

There can be no doubt that the ideal method of deciding general questions of the larger strategy is by having one person whose decisions, based on ample advice, are final.

That person, subject to the high points of policy which can only be decided by the Cabinet, is, and should be, the *First Sea Lord*.

If, however, he has not the final voice, the result must be that the policy becomes one of compromises, which is obviously unsound, and likely to lead to mistake, and possibly to disaster.

To go into particulars.

The attack on the Dardanelles is probably, from the point of view of high policy, quite correct.

On that point we have not sufficient acquaintance with the political situation to enable us to form an opinion, but what we are quite certain of is that it is a very expensive policy, and is likely, before we have done with it, to cost us several ships and an enormous expenditure of ammunition.

We have already lost, or more or less demobilized, ten battleships (including *Inflexible*). It is true that they are mostly old ones, and on the other hand, we have added, or shall shortly add, seven.

The Germans have lost none and have added six.²

As to the future, it is not known, so far as we are aware, what the Germans are going to do. But we do know that we are postponing battleship completion for the sake of arming a number of small craft, whose actual proposed use we are not familiar with, though

¹ Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir Frederick Hamilton, Second Sea Lord, 1914-1916, Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Cecil F. Lambert, Fourth Sea Lord, 1913-1916, and Rear-Admiral Tudor, Third Sea Lord and Controller.

² See Churchill's remarks on this 'good example of a certain class of arithmetic and of magnifying the enemy's strength' in *The World Crisis*, II, 304 n.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

obviously it must be for something totally unconnected with the bed-rock policy of maintaining the crushing superiority of the Grand Fleet.

Another matter which is delaying Battleship completion is the construction under the Admiralty of 15 'Howitzers' for purposes quite unconnected with any Fleet requirement.

Are you satisfied with the rate of progress of Battleship completion in the light of attached statement?

Is the prospect of obtaining supplies of ammunition sufficiently good to ensure there being enough available for the use of the Grand Fleet in the light of the expenditure involved by operations in the Dardanelles?

These are matters about which we are uneasy, and we ask you to assure us that the whole policy has your concurrence, and that you are satisfied with it.

If not, and you think there would be any value in the support of the Board (which still exists, at all events in name), we shall consider it our duty to give it to you.

F. T. H.

C. F. L.

F. C. T. T.

Admiralty

Armoured Ships Available

	Germany		England
<i>Dreadnoughts</i>	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 4 \text{ 'Königs'} \\ 5 \text{ 'Kaisers'} \\ 4 \text{ 'Ostfrieslands'} \\ 4 \text{ 'Nassaus'} \\ 5 \text{ Battle cruisers} \end{array} \right\}$	22-32	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 12 \text{ 13.5-inch and 14-inch battleships} \\ 11 \text{ 12-inch battleships} \\ 9 \text{ 13.5-inch \& 12-inch battle cruisers} \end{array} \right\}$
<i>11-inch guns</i>			
<i>3 above</i>			
11-inch	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 5 \text{ 'Deutschlands'} \\ 5 \text{ 'Braunschweigs'} \end{array} \right\}$	10-11	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 7 \text{ 'King Edwards'} \\ 4 \text{ 'Venerables', etc.} \end{array} \right\}$
9.4-inch	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 5 \text{ 'Wittelsbachs'} \\ 5 \text{ 'K. Friedrichs'} \end{array} \right\}$	10—	
		—	
		—	
<i>Total Battleships</i>	42	43	
		2	Deduct—refitting
		—	
		4 ¹	
		4	Deduct—'Venerables,' etc., too far off.
		—	
		—	
		42	
		37	
		189	

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<i>Available Battleships 9.4-inch &</i>	}	2	8	Allowing for 1 refitting
<i>9.2-inch</i>				
<i>Armoured cruisers</i>				
		—	—	
		44	45	
		==	==	
<i>Total available Armoured Ships</i>	}	44	45	
<i>with 9.2-inch & above</i>				

Germany has 4 15-inch Dreadnoughts and one 14-inch coming on, and their state of preparedness is not known.

We can only add the *Warspite* before July; unless we can get the *Queen Elizabeth*, *Agamemnon* and *Lord Nelson* home.

7.4.15

163: TO THE SEA LORDS

April 8th, 1915

Secret.

I have read your remarks with great attention and I desire to say that I am entirely in agreement with the fundamental principle which you seek to uphold, viz: that the Grand Fleet should always be in such strength that it can at all times be ready to meet the entire Fleet of the enemy with confident assurance as to the result.

The Dardanelles operation is undoubtedly one the political result of which, if successful, will be worth some sacrifice in matériel and personnel: it will certainly shorten the period of the war by bringing in fresh Allies in the Eastern theatre and will break the back of the German-Turkish alliance, besides opening up the Black Sea.

It was with hesitation that I consented to this undertaking, in view of the necessarily limited force of ships which could be devoted to it, of the shortage of shell and cordite, and of the factor of uncertainty which must always obtain when ships attack land fortifications and mined areas under their protection.

But, as you state, these high points of policy must be decided by the Cabinet; and in this case the real advantages to be gained caused me eventually to consent to their view, subject to strict limitation of the Naval forces to be employed, so that our position in the

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

decisive theatre — the North Sea — should not be jeopardized in any one arm.

I am of opinion at the present time that our supremacy is secure in Home Waters and that the forces detached are not such as to prejudice a decisive result should the High Sea Fleet come out to battle. But at the same time I consider that we have reached the absolute limit, and that we must stand or fall by the issue, for we can send out no more help of any kind. I have expressed this view very clearly to the First Lord, and should there at a later period be any disposition on the part of the Cabinet to overrule me on this point, I shall request my Naval colleagues to give their support in upholding my view.

I agree with you as to the desirability for proceeding now with the completion of the battleships in hand. The *Warspite* sails to-day to join the Grand Fleet, and I understand that *Barham*, *Valiant*, and *Malaya* are being pushed to the utmost extent, and also *Canada*, and that the remaining 15-inch land howitzers are not now being permitted to stand in the way. The 'Royal Sovereigns' building by contract should also be pressed on, but those in our own Dockyards cannot be concentrated upon to the same extent because of the primary claim of the refits and repairs of the active fleet.

I am satisfied with the position at present and in the near future, but shall of course be more satisfied when we get the battleships back from the Dardanelles.

The supply of cordite is very far from satisfactory. We cannot, however, stop the Dardanelles operations on this account and must accept the temporary reduction of the reserve of two outfits which it entails, exercising the greatest economy in expenditure of 15-inch and other critical calibres. But all extraneous sources of expenditure must be cut off at once.¹

164: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 9th, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

In reply to your remark about recalling 'Glasgow' class, they are the only type that can catch the 'Königsberg' class. Suppose the *Königsberg* breaks out of the Rufiji River [Tanganyika]. Unless we

¹ See *The World Crisis*, II, 305 n., 542-3.

had two ships there of the 'Glasgow' type (one always away coaling, etc.), she is bound to get away after her bottom being cleaned by the fresh water of the Rufiji River. None other but the 'Glasgow' type could catch the *Dresden*. We have the *Sydney* and *Melbourne* and your two cruisers chasing the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* [armed merchant cruiser] and the armed liner *Macedonia* (both very fast) at this very moment, and we have not ONE single vessel available to send off New York that could catch any of the fast armed German liners now ready to break out. (Our Ambassador telegraphed yesterday they all had their steam up ready to start! but so far they have not!) We CERTAINLY ought to have the *Invincible* or *Indomitable* off New York. No other vessel on account of big Atlantic seas and heavy gales could catch those German liners! *but it's purely sheer deference to your state of mind* that I don't order *Invincible* or *Indomitable* to New York. You and Beatty gave me such an awful time of it crying out about the *Princess Royal* day by day that I decided it really was better to chance it, and that is what I am doing, *against my own better judgment!*

I fear you and Madden, whose letters are really terrible, react on each other in your lugubrious forecasts of the gloomy future! I've not done it, but do let one of your satellites put down on a piece of paper *every vessel of every type* that you had on November 1, and, say, on April 15, when you get this, as I expect you'll be out on a cruise again before this reaches you, as there are portents of the High Sea Fleet moving again, as they are doing the usual sweeping only done when they mean to come out in force.

Ever yours,

F.

Every single person was dead against my own immediate imperative orders hustling the *Invincible* and *Inflexible* to the Falklands, and delay urgently requested, to which I would not accede, and see what happened at the Falklands! You and Madden want to bottle up everything up north, and we shall have a disaster. You will never get anywhere in time! and Germany will take Holland and the Texel and Terschelling. *We have nothing south to prevent it!*

Kitchener seems quite certain of success at the Dardanelles! *It's more than I am! . . .*¹

¹ Jellicoe's feelings must have been hurt by this letter, for on April 13th Fisher wrote him: 'Please believe the furthest thought in my mind in writing to you was the faintest doubt of your suitability of being where you are, so kindly let no such doubt come over you now or at any time. I wrote as the spirit moved me and I apologize if my words gave you any offence.'

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

165: TO ACTING VICE-ADMIRAL HENRY F. OLIVER
AND WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 11th, 1915

C.O.S.

First Lord.

Admiral de Robeck showed an ominous want of judgment in arranging for an old second-class cruiser like the *Talbot* to tow the *Inflexible* from Cape Malea [Greece] to Malta. Every Midshipman knows what the Malta Channel and mouth of the Adriatic is at this time of the year. The *Inflexible* would undoubtedly have foundered had not the Admiralty overruled Admiral de Robeck.

It was a disastrous want of judgment Admiral de Robeck hoisting his flag in *Inflexible* (against known Admiralty intentions) and taking her into close action.

There may be a third lack of judgment as regards *Queen Elizabeth*, so I press for my telegram, proposed yesterday, being sent at once.¹ Admiral de Robeck ought also to be warned against using *Lord Nelson* and *Agamemnon* in preference to the older ships, and I think he ought to be warned that the instant return of *Queen Elizabeth*, *Lord Nelson*, *Agamemnon* and light cruisers, torpedo destroyers, and submarines may be imminent.

F.

166: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

April 11th, 1915

A telegram has been sent (enclosed) about *Queen Elizabeth*. Personally I think it superfluous, but since you wish it I concur.

I do not consider that at this critical moment it would be right to

¹ '... it seems desirable to send a telegram to Admiral de Robeck that on no account whatever is the *Queen Elizabeth* to be risked as was the *Inflexible*, and she should be kept solely for long-range firing from the northern side of the Gallipoli Peninsula and not risked inside the Straits' (Fisher to Churchill, April 10th, 1915). Churchill had replied that day: 'V. A. de Robeck contemplates the use of *Q. E.* firing from Gaba Tepe. I am sure he is fully alive to the special need of taking care of this ship. I see no objection to emphasizing this before the attack takes place, but it would not be right at this moment to make a rigid prohibition of her entering the Straits. Of course she will not attempt to pass through into the Marmora.'

harass the Admiral by imposing any restrictions on his use of *Agamemnon* and *Lord Nelson*.

There is no reason for withdrawing your confidence from him because of the *Inflexible*. He had already ordered *Canopus* to go the whole way with her, when you very prudently telegraphed. Anyhow, I am told by the experts that either *Talbot* or *Canopus* could equally carry away any available hawsers.

It appears to me indispensable to send the Admiral Captain Phillimore¹ and the officers he requires for the vital and critical operation of landing the troops. See his last telegram. I am sure you will agree that this authorization should go first thing to-morrow. It ought to have gone to-night; but I do not wish to act without you even in the smallest matter.

Seriously, my friend, are you not a little unfair in trying to spite this operation by side winds and small points when you have accepted it in principle? It is hard on me that you should keep on like this — every day something fresh: and it is not worthy of you or the great business we have in hand together.

You know how deeply anxious I am to work with you. Had the Dardanelles been excluded, our co-operation would have been impossible. It is not right now to make small difficulties or add to the burden which in these times we have to bear.

Excuse frankness — but friends have this right, and to colleagues it is a duty.

167: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

April 12th, 1915

I did not get your upbraiding letter till after I had written to you about *Inflexible* being repaired at Gibraltar, which still seems desirable.

Never in all my whole life have I ever before so sacrificed my convictions as I have done to please you! THAT'S A FACT! Whoever told you that the *Talbot* was as good as a battleship to tow *Inflexible* must have been hypnotized by you² — nor is it correct that de Robeck had given orders before the Admiralty telegram. Off my

¹ Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Richard F. Phillimore commanded the *Inflexible* during the bombardment of the Dardanelles and was Principal Beach Master during the landing in Gallipoli.

² 'I had not said this; but only [No. 166] that the *Talbot* would equally have carried away the available hawsers' (*The World Crisis*, II, 308 n.).

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

own but I suggested the immediate dispatch of *Lord Nelson* and *Agamemnon* (hoping they would shield *Elizabeth* and *Inflexible*!). De Robeck will hoist his flag in the *Lord Nelson* you may be sure, instead of the *Vengeance*, his former Flagship. For the work in hand the *Vengeance* quite as good for close action. Nevertheless I say no more. The outside world is quite certain that I have pushed you, and not you me! So far as I know, the Prime Minister is the solitary person who knows to the contrary. I have not said one word to a soul on the subject except to Crease and Wilson and Oliver and Bartolomé, and you may be sure these four never open their mouths!

Indirectly I've worked up Kitchener from the very beginning *via* FitzGerald.

I think it's going to be a success, but I want to lose the oldest ships and to be chary of our invaluable officers and men for use in the decisive theatre.

168: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 14th, 1915
5 a.m.

My dear Jellicoe,

I've had a sleepless night over your being chased by a German submarine, of which we told you directly we learned of it, as reported by a Swedish ship, but there is no trace of any German submarine going to the northward, nor had the German air reconnaissance seen you, and it may be a 'put up' job on the part of the Swedish Captain, who had seen your Fleet and accordingly told the trawler that you were being followed, as the Swedes are all dead against us and supposed any day now to be going to join the Germans.

I think I told you [April 13th] that Tyrwhitt and his party of destroyers and submarines had been seen by the German airships (everyone now is wishing we had airships with 400 miles radius!), and this may have prevented their Fleet coming out as intended. Still, there seems to be something contemplated '*on the 15th*'!

. . . Italy is supposed to be going to join us this week, and Bulgaria in a fortnight, but this has been so often promised that I don't believe it. . . .

Yours always,

F.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

169: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall

April 15th, 1915

4 a.m.

BURN.

My dear Jellicoe,

I hope you are safely back at Scapa at the time of my writing this, BUT VON POHL HAS SOMETHING ON! *That is quite certain!* and has only deferred because they thought they counted many more submarines of ours than were really present. (One of them fired *three torpedoes* without hitting! Alas!) Anyhow, they postponed everything because of the submarines, and hustled out all their flotillas and aircraft. *Their air vessels saw our submarines long before our submarines saw the German aircraft.* I can't find out from anyone why you have not had aircraft to accompany your Fleet! Why was not *Ark Royal* appropriated to you? She is now doing wonderful service with her sea-planes at the Dardanelles, Smyrna, Enos, etc., etc. There's a report, which I can't trace to anything in writing from you, that you did not want them. If so, I suggest you should reconsider the matter. Anyhow, it is quite an 'eye-opener' to ME PERSONALLY how the German aircraft so efficiently spotted our submarines, and our submarines had no idea of having been seen by them! One Zeppelin was a whole hour over the Galloper Light-vessel [off Essex coast] without our aircraft attacking him. I am having this ruthlessly dealt with. I'm told there is a great want of activity in our aircraft on the East Coast. I have got an officer now always travelling and reporting and have effected revolutions already.¹ But I won't waste your time on what don't concern you, so won't describe WHAT MAKES MY BLOOD BOIL as regards effete superior officers! It's all rot (*and much worse*) having regard to anyone's feelings when the safety of our Empire is at stake. OLD WOMEN MUST GO!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

P.S. I wish you would write to the First Lord, as he is pining for a letter! He wants to come to Scapa to see you!

¹ The officer was Captain (afterwards Vice-Admiral Sir) Edward H. F. Heaton-Ellis.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

170: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 16th, 1915

BURN.

My dear Jellicoe,

We are sure that all the time you were all at sea these last few days only five German submarines in all were away from their homes, and certainly three, if not four, of these were identified in the English Channel and Irish Sea, so I really think some of the submarines reported by your ships MUST have been imaginary! Our information is so perfectly irrefutable that we are absolutely certain of our facts. Every day we get LITERALLY a SCORE of cases of IMPOSSIBLE submarines in the Channel and the Irish Sea! One can't help it.

Poor King-Hall lost the chance of his life through *Hyacinth* [light cruiser, flagship] engines breaking down, and so supply ship for *Königsberg* in the Rufiji River, armed and loaded with rifles and ammunition and guns, escaped him, beached and burnt by the crew.¹ It's too sad! *The only case during the War of engines breaking down!* Like a fool he only took one ship when he could have taken two!!! It's wonderful how such childish mistakes are made, but I NEVER forget that Sir Redvers Buller had mental paralysis at the battles of Colenso and Spion Kop [South African War]!

Von Pohl is assuredly up to something. It may be he is only going to exercise his Fleet, but they have hitherto always done this off Kiel, where they have a huge area defended by mines. One of our submarines torpedoed one of the German 'barrier breakers' (mine-bumpers, really), as they call them — a vessel of 5,000 tons about. She was hit fair but did not sink. Our torpedoes seem to be filled with sawdust!!! The mine-breaker steamed off gaily to Wilhelms-haven! and reported herself as not much damaged! There's a heavy reckoning coming for everyone connected with the *Vernon*² during the last four years, more especially in wireless. The mines are bad enough, and the Whiteheads [torpedoes]. I hope to get a good many officers disgraced for it all.

Yours always,

F.

¹ The light cruiser *Königsberg* had been blockaded in the Rufiji River since October 31st, 1914.

² H.M.S. *Vernon* was the Torpedo School at Portsmouth.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

171: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Admiralty, Whitehall

April 17th, 1915

Burn.

My dear Jellicoe,

We really thought the battle would be joined to-day! Everything pointed to it. The after funnels of all his destroyers had been painted yellow (*for night work presumably*). They had arranged not to return till dawn of 19th or night of 19th, and suddenly a very urgent and immediate order given for the whole Fleet to return home, and the last ship got in and was anchored at 4.45 p.m. We can only attribute their sudden flight back home at 10.45 a.m. our time to their hearing wireless, whether from you or Beatty I don't know. As you know, they have got this directive arrangement in working order. Anyhow, at 10.45 a.m. they suddenly bolted home, and great disappointment in consequence. On the other hand, it's most gratifying what an utterly blue fright they are in of meeting us. We know they did not mean to return in daylight, as they were so afraid of our submarines, so this makes it so remarkable their suddenly bolting home.

I'm too utterly sleepy to write any more.

Yours,

F.

172: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

Admiralty, Whitehall

April 20th, 1915

BURN.

Please keep contents of this letter ENTIRELY to yourself.

My dear Jellicoe,

If there was no wireless in your Fleet on Sunday forenoon [April 18th], then the only explanation of the very sudden and precipitate flight of von Pohl is that the 3rd airship he had out with his battle cruisers spotted you without your spotting the airship, which is quite conceivable. This 3rd airship probably came right back to von Pohl without using wireless, as we got no signals whatever from it as from the other two airships. *Anyhow the fact remains that the very last thing that von Pohl desires is to fight you!* and it's remarkable his making the

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

signal *after his return into harbour* to be instantly ready for an attack by the enemy, all repairs to be stopped, not even boiler cleaning, and to replenish fuel *instantly*! What he thought you were going to do I can't imagine, unless to come right bang into Schilling Roads, where all his Fleet were that night, like Nelson found all the French Fleet in Aboukir Bay! regardless of his submarines and destroyers!

The First Lord is off this afternoon to France for three or four days. This is supposed to be a dead secret, but I expect all the world knows and wonders!

The Dardanelles will now soon begin. It's a huge gamble, but all the politicians [on] both sides have shoved us into it, or rather Winston has shoved all of them! If a success, it undoubtedly will be an immense coup to have got Constantinople.

Yours,

F.

P.S. Winston *very pleased* to get your letter.

173: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 21st, 1915

Private

My dear Jellicoe,

I am now carrying on a fierce war against the *Vernon* at the scandalous neglect they have evinced in not fitting our submarines with adequate wireless. The German submarines WE KNOW send 250 miles! Our wireless is 50 miles! I assure you that the *Vernon* and the Assistant Director of Torpedoes¹ have for the last four or five years been far worse than d—d fools! They have been trying to make German toys [i.e. cheap products] and failed and neglected the absolute essentials. Our torpedoes won't hit, and, when they do hit, produce no more effect than sawdust! And our mines scandalously defective and went off automatically, literally, by thousands after being laid down! However, I hope to be 'even' with the principal culprits, though it will be inadequate, as they ought to be shot!

Von Pohl is still keeping tremendously on the alert! 'Instant readiness', no repairs, not even 'boiler cleaning'. Our idiots keep on

¹ Captain (afterwards Admiral) Philip W. Dumas, Assistant Director of Torpedoes, 1914-1917.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

disparaging the German airships. You will soon have them at Scapa Flow, each carrying two tons of explosive! I wish you would ask for aeroplanes as well as the seaplanes that are coming to you. The last Zeppelin dropped a bomb close to the *Britannia* [training vessel] in the Tyne! The seaplanes cannot mount up to the heights required to deal with the Zeppelins. You MUST have aeroplanes and undoubtedly they can (*if you have a sufficient number*) defend you against the Zeppelins. You should write direct to First Lord and ask for them at once, before they are all sent to the Dardanelles, where they are now going by dozens!

Yours,

F.

174: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall

April 23rd, 1915

Private

Burn.

My beloved Jellicoe,

This time von Pohl did NOT paint his destroyers' after funnels *yellow*, so at first it was decided to let you stay in harbour, but after an hour's thought, I told Oliver to make the signal for you to go out, because there is always the 'off chance' of the best of Admirals having a fit of mental aberration, like Tryon making the wrong signal!¹ or von Ingenohl associating the slow *Blücher* with the faster battle cruisers and not having a battle squadron in support! *But the fundamental fact* is that you never can be in time so long as you are at Scapa Flow, and therefore there will NEVER be a battle with the German High Sea Fleet unless von Pohl goes north specially to fight you, *and that he never will!* That's the situation and you can't alter it! I have no alternative to Scapa Flow to suggest, as I realize the limitations of the Humber, which is our *real strategic* centre. But as I said before, von Pohl may make a mistake, so it's prudent for you to come out, and once in the open ocean you are more free than bottled up in Scapa!

SECONDLY, *German airships preclude your surprising von Pohl*, and this

¹ The Mediterranean Fleet flagship *Victoria* had been rammed on June 2nd, 1893, by the battleship *Camperdown*. The *Victoria* went to the bottom, and with her the Commander-in-Chief, Vice-Admiral Sir George Tryon. The disaster was apparently the result of a simple miscalculation by Tryon.

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

is what you must rub in, as I am like 'a voice crying in the wilderness'. They ALL HERE put me down as an *airship fanatic!* *Everyone does!* because I've got 25 of them building and two finished now working with Bacon at Dover¹ (one built in 18 days!). She goes 50 miles an hour! Von Pohl's airships yesterday covered a semi-circle of 300 miles, with von Pohl as a centre, and before long they will be dropping bombs on you at Scapa, and so you *must* have *aeroplanes!* *Seaplanes no use.*

Yours,

F.

P.S. Winston in France when von Pohl came out.

175: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 23rd, 1915

My dear Jellicoe,

It's MOST instructive that the German Admiralty have officially notified in the German newspapers that the High Sea Fleet has several times lately been out 'in English waters'! (They never were more than about 60 miles from Heligoland! so that's rather sweet calling it 'English waters'.) The Germans NEVER would have notified this if they really had the least idea of fighting us — *they would have kept it all most secret.*

To-day begins the Dardanelles, a most momentous operation and the very biggest 'gamble' that any government ever acceded to! Let us hope for the best, *and the unexpected always happens in war.* The German General in command may make a mess of it, or the Turkish ammunition may fail. The Germans have sent their best Generals and Admirals there. SECRET. We have got hold of communications to them! But yet they may fail. *Even Homer nodded!*

*'Aliquando bonus
Dormitat Homerus.'*

I'm too busy to write more.

F.

¹ Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Reginald H. S. Bacon, commanding the Dover Patrol, 1915-1918.

I had a most interesting talk with Dreyer. *I am devoted to him.* All is arranged as he wishes.¹ *He ought to be on board the Iron Duke.* Sir Michael Seymour² lunched with me yesterday and he *spontaneously* said to me he had never heard of any Admiral who had commanded such universal confidence as yourself. Three cheers!

176: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

April 23rd, 1915

Most Secret

*SOME ASPECTS OF THE MOVEMENTS OF THE GERMAN
HIGH SEA FLEET*

It has often been pointed out that the German Fleet is merely a wing of the German Army, and it is military interests mainly, though not only, that Germany will seek to serve by some desperate naval step.

Here are some of the objects Germany will seek to obtain by the possible, if remote, chance of success:

1. Germany almost certainly knows that the First New English Army is practically ready. She may hope by an actual naval success, or by exciting the supposed nervous apprehensions of the British Public (an illusion to which Germany probably clings), to detain this new English Army at Home, which would be a prodigious German military advantage.

2. She might hope, in case of a large English Naval loss in the North Sea, that English ships would have to be withdrawn from Turkish waters.

3. Germany must be intensely apprehensive of the possibility of early Italian and Roumanian intervention. The only certain way of preventing this would be a success against the British Fleet, and the resulting loss of British prestige. A great risk would be worth while even on a slight chance of achieving this.

4. There is reason to believe that Germany is about to be faced with a real shortage of food. The American Ambassador in Berlin has suggested that in a month's time Germany may starve her

¹ Captain Dreyer, who had been Jellicoe's flag-commander in two squadrons before the war, became his flag-captain (H.M.S. *Iron Duke*) in October 1915 (-1916).

² Captain (afterwards Vice-Admiral, fourth Baronet) Michael Culme-Seymour, commanding the dreadnought *Centurion*, 2nd Battle Squadron, 1913-1916.

prisoners. German public opinion and German naval opinion may force Germany to make a supreme effort against the British Fleet, to which Germany owes all her difficulties.

5. Germany is no doubt well aware that great supplies of ammunition are now due for delivery from the United States, and these can only be prevented by a German success at sea.

The above considerations might not unreasonably be held to justify a desperate move on Germany's part. The recent manœuvres of the German Fleet point in this direction.

First, there is the adoption of the submarine blockade, aimed (mark this well) not mainly at the East Coast, where it could be most effective and damaging, but to a great extent at the *West Coast*, difficult of access as it is to the German submarines. One of the main objects of this may be to induce the British Admiralty to withdraw their Destroyer Patrols from the East Coast to the West, where they are of no strategical value against German operations in the North Sea.

Recently, however, there seems to have been a cessation of activity on the part of the German submarines on the West Coast. This may be due partly to failure on the part of the submarines and partly to the fact that most of them have been withdrawn from that area. They may have been withdrawn in order to co-operate with the German Fleet in some great plan to be executed by the new Commander-in-Chief of the German High Sea Fleet.

The comparative inactivity of the German minelayers may be also due to their desire to husband their mines for the great plan.

Now let us see how the movements of the High Sea Fleet fit in to this idea. The object of its recent excursions, which were all combined with extended aerial reconnaissance at sea, was solely to discover what moves our Fleet makes in reply to their move. The German chess player risks his pawns to discover our opening moves, and to try and penetrate our plan. Possibly he may be just as skilful as we are in locating the position of the various fleets.

On the basis of this skilful reconnaissance the enemy will formulate his plan. It is nearly certain to depend on the placing of mine-fields in one part of the North Sea, and the massing of a number of the highly efficient and practised German submarines in another — in some part where they believe that but few destroyers are to be found.

The High Sea Fleet then will be used as a bait.

Certainly the present moment is one for very great English naval vigilance, particularly if the submarine blockade does not get more active. Its quiescence is like suppressed gout — alarming in its possibilities.

It would indeed be a great blessing if we can get the German Fleet out and give them a severe knock. We can no doubt do this in a stand-up fight, but there is a latent element of uncertainty about these infernal under-water machines.

It may be noticed in the War Office Secret Intelligence Summary that two Army Corps have been concentrated at Hamburg, Kiel, and Flensburg, where transports in abundance are kept ready.

There are three things we must unfailingly see to!

I. Instantly we know of German naval preparations, we must, to avoid von Pohl trapping our Fleet with mines and submarines, get our Grand Fleet out of harbour to a rendezvous, and preferably to a rendezvous continuously traversed by the Scandinavian merchant shipping, as they will then be our mine seekers.

II. We must keep the German eastern (or inshore) exit blocked with mines somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Amrum Bank; for besides the consequent interference with the German mercantile traffic to the Elbe, it compels the German High Sea Fleet to use the western exit off Nordeney, which is best suited for the action of our submarines.

III. We must keep submarines continuously in the neighbourhood of this western exit of the German Fleet.

F.

177: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

April 25th, 1915

I am quite sick about our submarines and mines and not shooting at Zeppelins (who never can go higher than 2,000 yards and light cruisers bound to bring them down). Really yesterday had it not been for the Dardanelles forcing me to stick to you through thick and thin I would have gone out of the Admiralty never to return, and sent you a postcard to get Sturdee up at once in my place. You would then be quite happy!!!

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

178: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall

April 26th, 1915

4 A.M.!!

My dear Jellicoe,

I think I told you I had Heaton-Ellis (now gone to *Inflexible vice* Phillimore to the Dardanelles) and now [Captain Charles E.] Le Mesurier going round everywhere making microscopic enquiries on my behalf (*with a letter from me*) into the whole distribution of vessels and working of details everywhere connected with the war arrangements, and much fruit has resulted already and great alterations effected in the Channel. No longer do German submarines come by the Dover Straits, as one of the consequences — the Channel too hot for them. They confess it. They now all go via Scotland, which in one way is bad, because bad for you, but it makes their voyages more hazardous. I write all this because of the apparent supineness of the East Coast patrols, and have not yet got Le Mesurier's report, but I am credibly informed that the *Sentinel* [light cruiser], for instance, has not been outside the Firth for two months, nor Lowry's submarines either. I've called for a report, but why don't Beatty or Bradford represent this to you, considering your position as C.-in-C. and that you have unexpectedly to traverse routes proceeding to your various rendezvous which are infested with trawlers flying brand-new Scandinavian or Dutch ensigns, and who after you have passed use Telefunken wireless! (So I hear.) These patrols of local scouts and submarines should go out on these various routes that you and Beatty may travel on and hold up these trawlers and send them into port. Surely, wireless could be discovered in them, if there. However, all this is hearsay. I don't get it from Beatty, but you could ask him whether he *did* pass such trawlers with *such* ensigns and *such* wireless! And as to Lowry, I'm going to deal with him myself, if he is so supine as reported.

Yours for evermore,

F.

The Dardanelles operations begun, but no report up to the moment of my writing this.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

179: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 28th, 1915

Secret

My dear Jellicoe,

The Dardanelles news is not very good and more troops are being sent, but if once entrenched we shall be all right and can't be shoved out! One party had to be re-embarked. The losses are very heavy, but our news is very scanty and Ian Hamilton is wise not to say more.

All the secret news we get from day to day makes it clearer and clearer to me that the German High Sea Fleet are never going to fight us. *They are evidently in a blue funk of Sir John Jellicoe!* Their air reconnaissances are unceasing — always three or four airships are out every day without fail, and in perpetual suspicion of new English minefields everywhere!

Bacon is so splendidly energetic in the Dover Straits that no more submarines come that way, so our troops cross to France without anxiety now, and we are sending troops now nightly *in thousands and thousands: thirty thousand this week, I believe!* The Haddock *Queen Mary* has been most effective off New York! The moment she was reported, the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* at once interned! We have no other reason for the sudden action. . . .

Yours in haste,

F.

180: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 29th, 1915

BURN.

Dear Jellicoe,

I was perforce absent on other business from Admiralty for a few hours yesterday, and Winston & Co. got up a totally baseless scare in that interval and sent you orders to be ready at two hours' notice, which, however, were cancelled directly I returned. Big German men of war were reported off Dunkirk, which certainly was bombarded with 12-inch shell, which they picked up, but they were

FIRST SEA LORD, 1914-1915

fired from shore guns 30,000 yards off, and not from ships, as they supposed.

The *Sentinel* at Rosyth, I see by her log, has only been seven hours away from her anchors for two months. I'm going in for drastic changes in all directions on the East Coast. I'm only awaiting return of Le Mesurier, who is finding out scandals, *but why do not these things get reported? Surely Beatty, Bradford, and others ought to have done so!* Everyone is far too careful about susceptibilities and interfering with other people's business, forgetting that the fate of the Empire is at stake in this War and that NOTHING should interfere with efficiency. The management of the *Vernon* in the past four years has been little less than criminal, and so also the submarine and destroyer business. All the right people are going to be hung all right!

Yours,

F.

P.S. Having put on paper that the Grand Fleet is always *instantly to go to sea* on the *least provocation* by the German Fleet, I never can, of course, object to instant orders being sent to you in my absence of even only a few hours!

181: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 29th, 1915

Dear Jellicoe,

We have telegrams showing that all the German submarines are going outside Ireland — not one through Dover Straits. Four more left Germany this morning to go the same route. This is an immense relief, as we are sending many thousands of men every night across the Channel (*Folkestone to Boulogne*) — about 160,000 men probably this week and next! so it's an immense relief to us the submarines being excluded from Dover.

[no signature]

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

182: TO HERBERT L. SAMUEL¹

Admiralty, Whitehall
April 29th, 1915

Private

Dear Mr. Samuel,

. . . I read your excellent paper with conviction as to inclusion in the English sphere of Palestine, and the excellent Committee we have working on the matter will, I feel certain, forward your views, but please say nothing of this at present, unless you've heard of it from elsewhere. I'm giving it all my support.

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Afterwards first Viscount Samuel; President of the Local Government Board, 1914-1915. He had circulated a paper to the Cabinet in March, urging that in the partition of Turkey the British should take Palestine, open it up to Jewish immigration, and reconstruct it as a Jewish centre which in due course would achieve home rule. The paper formed the basis for subsequent policy on the Jewish National Home. It is interesting that Fisher backed it.

CHAPTER II

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

AN underlying cause of the May crisis was the incompatibility in temperament and outlook between the First Lord and the First Sea Lord, which prevented them from working very long together in harmony. Here were two masterful men, with brilliant intellects and active minds, each accustomed to being absolutely supreme in any work he undertook, and each very intolerant of any criticism or opposition.

A second important underlying factor, an outgrowth of the first, was, to quote Crease,

the deep personal irritation caused Fisher by the First Lord's methods of conducting the business . . . the constant bombardment of memoranda and minutes on every conceivable subject, technical or otherwise; the manner of sending telegrams and orders from the Admiralty; the consultation with others on matters entirely within the province of the First Sea Lord; and other similar personal matters. It was the cumulative effect of all these that caused Lord Fisher's resignation . . .

As early as January, Fisher was complaining that on purely technical matters he was frequently overruled. ('He outargues me.') Above all, Fisher was continually and increasingly irritated by Churchill's methods in dealing with telegrams, and in issuing often in his own name the executive orders to the fleets, squadrons, and ships. No doubt the First Lord felt that he was the best interpreter of the Admiralty instructions and views even in operational matters. Usually he sent the draft telegram for Fisher's concurrence, but on occasions no draft was sent.

Now, the First Lord was the 'supreme and controlling authority' at the Admiralty, and there was nothing to prevent his interference in professional matters; there was, indeed, ample precedent. All the same, it was the general view, certainly in the Navy, that it was improper and dangerous for a First Lord to dispute the opinion of the First Sea Lord in a purely professional matter. The Sea Lords supported Fisher with an unsolicited minute on May 16th (see No. 199). Churchill replied that no order had ever been sent to the

Fleet except upon the written authority of the First Sea Lord. This was not entirely true. As recently as the afternoon of May 14th, the First Lord, pressed by the Italian Naval Attaché, had telegraphed through the Foreign Office to the Italian Minister of Marine that certain ships were being dispatched to co-operate with the Italian Fleet. The telegram had been sent without Fisher's concurrence, a note by Churchill on the draft of the document reading: '*1st Sea Lord to see after action.*' Churchill afterwards claimed that all he was doing in sending these ships to the Adriatic was merely by way of expediting the arrangements for naval co-operation which had been agreed upon in Paris a week earlier. This, he claims, was 'vital' in view of intelligence of 'the uncertainty and convulsions now prevailing in Rome . . . No question of principle was involved by accelerating their departure by forty-eight hours'.¹ But Fisher's later comment was: 'May 14, 1914. So the First Lord was moving the Fleet behind the First Sea Lord's back! . . . Also there were other moments.' It might be added that most of Churchill's telegrams give the impression that it was the First Lord speaking and not the Board.

However, it must be stressed that, contrary to Churchill's assertion that the May 14th affair was 'the spark that fired the train',² the evidence is that the incident had, in Crease's words, 'no influence whatever' on Fisher's decision to resign. The Admiral having retired when the First Lord's telegram of the 14th arrived that night, he did not see it until the next day — late that day, as he did not come to his office that morning. 'The telegram was certainly not the spark that fired the train, though undoubtedly it fed the flames.'³ Nor is there substance in Churchill's attributing a secondary cause of the resignation to Fisher's alleged jealousy of Kitchener's position (a professional serving as War Minister and member of the War Council). There is no evidence of any jealousy of Kitchener.⁴

The long-delayed head-on clash between Fisher and Churchill came over the Dardanelles migraine: the dangerous depletion of the Navy in home waters to provide reinforcements for the Dardanelles was the immediate cause of Fisher's resignation. The Admiral had

¹ *The World Crisis*, II, 357-8.

² *Ibid.*, II, 358.

³ Crease's letter to Churchill, 1923; *ibid.*, II (2nd ed.), p. 553. Churchill was 'glad to think that my surmise that he was offended by the terms of my minute about the cruisers that were sent to Italy, and by the fact that they were dispatched in anticipation of his formal sanction, was incorrect' (*ibid.*, II, 557).

⁴ The legend is repeated in Robert Blake: *The Unknown Prime Minister: the Life and Times of Bonar Law, 1858-1923* (London, 1955), p. 242. Blake had probably relied upon *The World Crisis*, II, 358.

agreed with extreme reluctance on January 28th not to resign and to support the operation. But it meant, as time went on and as he had feared, a gradual draining of Britain's naval resources from the decisive theatre of war. The naval demands of the Dardanelles were jeopardizing the superiority of the Grand Fleet, which was absolutely essential to the successful prosecution of the war. On this point Jellicoe, Fisher, and the Sea Lords were agreed. But with the Army clinging to its dearly won positions by tooth and nail, Churchill was determined to see the campaign through to a successful issue. On May 12th he proposed to send out further reinforcements of ships from England. Fisher consented to two of the older battleships and two 14-inch monitors going out if the *Queen Elizabeth* were ordered home. He was no longer prepared to risk this new super-dreadnought at the Dardanelles in view of reports of impending U-boat activity in the area. A settlement was reached on these lines that afternoon, and the *Queen Elizabeth* was ordered home that night (over Kitchener's violent objections). On May 14th the War Council decision to continue the Dardanelles operation foreshadowed the diversion of further ships for the purpose. Early that evening Fisher and Churchill had a satisfactory meeting at which they reached what Fisher considered a definite and final understanding regarding the naval reinforcements to be sent to the Dardanelles. Crease was called in by Fisher directly after this interview. It was his recollection later that the Admiral mentioned only six large monitors and four 'Edgar' class cruisers fitted with bulges, but that he had concluded 'quite cheerily: "But I suppose he'll be at me again."'

About five the next morning (the 15th), Fisher received a number of minutes (dated the 14th, and probably written towards midnight), which called for reinforcements considerably in excess of what had been agreed upon some twelve hours earlier: four 'Edgars' (cruisers), nine large monitors, some 9.2-inch monitors, submarines, drifters, and trawlers, the whole supply of nets for several weeks to come, and other things; also that siege artillery should be put in hand (which would delay the completion of guns and mountings for the battleships under construction), and that reserve heavy naval guns should be mounted on shore, which would involve taking ammunition and cordite from the already depleted reserves. Finally there was a string of other proposals for reorganizing the Grand Fleet which involved, among other things, moving two armoured cruiser squadrons to the Humber. These minutes are reproduced below (No. 189). Crease has pointed out that paragraph six in the crucial

first minute, which called for sending two more 'E' submarines to the Dardanelles, was a wholly new proposal which had not been discussed at all the night before and which 'concerned him [Fisher] deeply', as he held strong views that more submarines could not be spared from home waters. Crease continues:

This new proposal, together with the enlargements that a few hours had produced in respect to 15-inch howitzers, 9.2-inch guns and the number of monitors, etc. (for the numbers of these set out in the minute greatly exceeded those in Lord Fisher's mind when Mr. Churchill left him that evening) convinced Lord Fisher that there was no finality about any agreement reached with Mr. Churchill on the subject of the Dardanelles reinforcements, and caused his immediate resignation when it reached him.¹

Churchill's proposals of the 15th were, then, for Fisher the last straw, as he realized that concessions would only be followed by fresh demands. Before breakfast, in the early morning of the 15th, he sent off a letter of resignation to the Prime Minister, and set in motion plans for going to Scotland. Asquith wanted to discuss the matter but was unable to locate the Admiral, who was neither at the Admiralty nor in his official house adjoining the Admiralty. (Bacon suggests that he was very probably in Westminster Abbey, 'where he frequently attended Matins and also repaired when his mind was agitated or disturbed'.)² The Prime Minister was impatient, observing that it was a grave dereliction of duty for an officer holding the foremost naval place in time of war to desert his post and not be

¹ Churchill, writing to Crease in 1923, stressed the submarine aspect of the problem: 'In my conversation with Lord Fisher in the evening of May 14 to which you refer, we reached, as you say, a general agreement on the immediate reinforcements to be dispatched at that juncture to the Dardanelles. But this could not be regarded in the nature of a final bargain or treaty between separate and hostile powers. Obviously a duty lay upon the First Sea Lord no less than upon me to sustain the Fleet and Army at the Dardanelles by every means possible without endangering our main position in the North Sea, and any reasonable and practicable succour that was available must at least be open to discussion between us. I can only suppose that further reflection and heartsearching on the problem between the time when Lord Fisher retired to rest and I, late in the night, completed the final edition of my minute, led me to feel that the two submarines were an essential part of the proper treatment of the problem. The Admiral on the spot was evidently asking for them... I cannot therefore feel that I was wrong in wishing to include them among the proposals sent to the First Sea Lord, not as matters decided upon, but for consideration and discussion as I was careful to make plain in my covering note to the minute.... The addition of the two submarines must have appeared to me as not raising any new question of principle between me and the First Sea Lord, and at the same time most necessary in itself' (*The World Crisis*, II [2nd ed.], pp. 557-8).

² *Fisher*, II, 259.

available for the conduct of urgent business. This urgency was underscored by the belief that the High Sea Fleet had put to sea and that a decisive battle might, therefore, be in the offing.¹ Asquith thereupon addressed a peremptory note to Fisher that morning: 'In the King's name I order you to remain at your post.' This finally reached the Admiral, in a room in the Charing Cross Hotel, and he went to see the Prime Minister that afternoon. Thereafter he no longer spoke of leaving for Scotland at once, although he apparently was still determined to resign. Except for a midday visit to the Admiralty on Monday, the 17th, to superintend the removal of his private possessions, he does not appear to have visited his office after the evening of the 14th. He did, however, keep in touch with the war situation, for a few days anyway: all important papers were brought to him, etc.

The Government put all kinds of pressure on him to remain, and A. K. Wilson and Jellicoe pleaded with him to stay.² A talk with Sir Edward Grey at the Foreign Office on the 17th, coupled with a letter from Asquith later that day, both urging him to do nothing and say nothing for a few days, entirely changed Fisher's outlook. This, at any rate, is Crease's opinion, who adds that Fisher was now sure that the impending reconstruction of the Government on coalition lines (Fisher's resignation, coming on top of the revelation of a shortage of high-explosive shell, threatened to topple the Asquith Government) would mean that he would be kept on and Churchill let go. Completely confident that he would be indispensable to the new Government, and believing that eight of the Conservative cabinet ministers designate were working on his behalf, he now proceeded, on May 19th, to dictate to the Prime Minister his own terms as regards personnel and policies for staying on (see No. 208). This was Fisher's fatal blunder. In Crease's considered judgment, if he had said and done nothing between the 17th and 22nd, as advised by many of his friends, he would have been asked to stay by the new Government, and could then have gradually introduced changes he felt necessary. Even Admiral Bacon admits that Fisher had gone too far in dictating to the Prime Minister, and he questions the value of the proposals themselves.

¹ Masterton-Smith to Asquith, November 6th, 1923 (Asquith Papers); the Earl of Oxford and Asquith: *Memories and Reflections* (2 vols., London, 1928), II, 109.

² There is, however, some evidence that the Sea Lords now considered Fisher a danger, wished to see him leave, and were even intriguing through the D.N.I., Captain Hall, to have the Prime Minister accept the proffered resignation. See James: *The Eyes of the Navy*, pp. 83-5.

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The Board he proposed was a weak one, and he intended to part with everyone who would attempt to exercise any control over him — he saw himself as an uncontrolled autocrat . . . At this time, his age and the strain of the last six months at the Admiralty had begun to warp his calm and clear judgment, and had made him more intolerant of opposition.¹

In course of time Fisher came to see the error of his tactics. In a note of May 9th, 1916, to a friend he wrote: 'Moses spake unadvisedly with his lips — *so did I!* Had I held my tongue and only shaken my head, but said nothing, I should have crossed over Jordan! I should still be First Sea Lord!' But at the time, his conditions reflected his exasperation over the fact that the Fleet was not making the most of its opportunities, and that only he could rectify that by taking over the supreme direction of the war at sea. But he had gone too far: his 'extraordinary ultimatum' savoured of 'megalomania' to Asquith. ' . . . the whole of his conduct at this critical time convinced me that it had become impossible that he should remain responsible for the Admiralty.'²

Fisher learned during the evening of May 21st that Balfour was to replace Churchill. He then knew that it was all over, since he could not work with him: Balfour had, with Churchill, been the prime mover of the Dardanelles business. The Admiral told Crease on the morning of the 22nd that the Conservative ministers had not stood by him and that he was leaving for Scotland by the next train. 'He was in a state of great excitement and told me that Sir Henry Jackson had been, or would be, asked to take his place and that he meant to clear out as soon as possible.' It must be added that Crease, McKenna, and Hankey, Fisher's closest advisers in those critical days, were all emphatic that he should go away. However, he agreed with Crease and McKenna that he could not leave the Admiralty without some authority, and the two persuaded Hankey to see Asquith and get a leave of absence for him. But the Prime Minister was at that moment with the King at Buckingham Palace. Fisher left on the 2 p.m. train from Euston for Glasgow. Hankey got the necessary leave *after 2 p.m.* — the Prime Minister, though very angry with Fisher, sanctioned his departure — and it was wired to him at Crewe by Crease. The Admiral apparently was prepared to turn back at Crewe or Carlisle, or from Scotland the next day, if the Prime Minister did not approve his leaving. But that evening Asquith

¹ *Fisher*, II, 271-2.

² Asquith: *Memories and Reflections*, II, 113.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

accepted Fisher's resignation. Churchill, replaced by Balfour on May 26th, accepted the sinecure of the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster but continued to sit on the War Council.

When Fisher left the Admiralty (he insisted he had been 'kicked out!'), he proceeded directly to Scotland — to Dungavel at Strathaven (Lanarkshire), the home of the Duke of Hamilton, 'a dear midshipman of mine in two ships for many years! It is quite in the very wilds, the grouse at the doors . . . so no newspaper man can get here or visitor! . . . I never mean to go near London again till after the War. I shall probably stay on here, as the Duke and Duchess are both very dear friends, and it is like home being with them' (Fisher to Mrs. R. W. Lovett, June 1st, 1915). But he was not cheerful. 'It is *very, very* sad all your plans being upset.' Without doubt he counted on the strength of public opinion and expected to be recalled, either as First Lord or First Sea Lord, within a few weeks. He was recalled, but to a lesser position. Never again was he to play an important role in the determination of naval policy. He lingered on, a 'helpless spectator', in Churchill's words.

183: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL¹

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 11th, 1915

Secret
First Lord.

In view of the recent intelligence of the position of affairs at the Dardanelles, I desire formally to put on record my views as to the subsequent progress of the operations. This is necessary because of the suggestion that you have made to me, that it may be expedient and a wise operation of war that the Fleet should again essay to attack or rush the Dardanelles forts without assistance from the Army.

Our deliberations on the subject of these operations have been conducted either in personal conference or by the interchange of

¹ Attached to the memorandum that follows was this covering note: 'Dear Winston, With much reluctance, in view of our conversation of this morning, I feel compelled to send you the enclosed formal memorandum of my views respecting the Dardanelles, as it is essential that on so vital a point I should not leave you in any doubt as to my opinion. Yours, F.'

'I have had no communication whatever with Sir A. Wilson or Sir H. Jackson on the subject.'

informal notes, and there is therefore no official record of the views that I have from time to time expressed. Although I have acquiesced in each stage of the operations up to the present, largely on account of considerations of political expediency and the political advantage which those whose business it is to judge of these matters have assured me would accrue from success, or even partial success, I have clearly expressed my opinion that I did not consider the original attempt to force the Dardanelles with the Fleet alone was a practicable operation.

I have always insisted that the North Sea is the proper theatre of operations of our Fleet, since there alone is it possible for the enemy to cause us irreparable disaster or for us to gain a decisive victory. For this reason I have looked with misgiving on the steady drain of our Naval force to the Dardanelles during the last four months, whether the operations were to be conducted in conjunction with the Army or not. This collection of forces in the Mediterranean has been carried out so gradually that it has been difficult for me to decide at what point danger was threatened in the North Sea; yet each successive increment to the Fleet in the Mediterranean has appeared essential to the success of the local operations. Nevertheless, I was compelled finally to write to you some few weeks ago that I considered we had reached finality, and that no further depletion of our forces in Home Waters was permissible without grave risk in the principal theatre of the Naval war.

Yesterday evening you sent me a draft telegram for my concurrence, giving a proposed reply to the telegram received from Vice-Admiral de Robeck earlier in the day.¹ The general tone of this telegram implied that the Board of Admiralty might be prepared to sanction the Fleet undertaking further operations against the forts irrespective of the Army being unable to advance beyond their present positions. I made an amendment, without which I was not able to concur in this telegram being sent, inserting the words, 'A Naval attack cannot even be considered until the Italians, etc. etc.' I have not heard from you whether this telegram, or any, has actually been sent. I presume not, as I have seen no copy.² But it is

¹ De Robeck's telegram of May 9th indicated an interest, though rather lukewarm, in renewing the naval offensive.

² Churchill has commented: 'I cannot trace this draft. No doubt it was to the effect that while an attempt to rush the Straits could not immediately be authorized, operations should be undertaken to sweep the Kephez minefield under cover of the Fleet and force the forts to exhaust their ammunition. It seems probable that the words introduced by Lord Fisher destroyed the purpose and meaning of the telegram. It was not sent. Nothing was ever sent without his agreement' (*The World Crisis*, II, 342 n.).

clearly in my mind that you yourself would be prepared to sanction such a proceeding.

I therefore feel impelled to inform you definitely and formally of my conviction that such an attack by the Fleet on the Dardanelles forts, in repetition of the operations which failed on 18th March, or any attempt by the Fleet to rush by the Narrows, is doomed to failure, and, moreover, is fraught with possibilities of disaster utterly incommensurate to any advantage that could be obtained therefrom.

In my opinion we cannot afford to expose any more ships to the risk of loss in the Dardanelles, since the ships there, though not consisting in the main of first line units, are the reserve on which we depend entirely for supremacy in the event of any unforeseen disaster. Ships sent up to the Sea of Marmora before the forts had been occupied by the Army would be exposed to great danger, in my opinion, both in getting there and after their arrival.

Before the naval attack of March 19th, I expressed the opinion at the War Council that the whole operation, if pressed to a conclusion, would entail a loss of twelve battleships. Three battleships of the Allies were sunk on the 19th, and two others very severely injured, although they never came to really close quarters with the powerful batteries at the Narrows and never got close enough to attempt to cross a permanent minefield. If we now try to rush the Narrows, we shall first have to silence and completely control the fire of the very heavy batteries situated there, and then to force our way through minefields. The experience we have gained up to date does not encourage me to think that there is any reasonable prospect even of silencing the guns; the gunners will retire from them until we are at such close quarters that they cannot miss, and then the guns will be fired at hulling range.

The sweeping of the mines in the Narrows is an operation which, in my opinion, experience has shown not to be possible, even after the batteries have been silenced, until the heights on either side have been occupied by the military.

Even after the Narrows are forced we have still to deal with the Nagara group of forts, and there will certainly be further minefields beyond the Narrows and in the Sea of Marmora. Consequently, in addition to the heavy ships, we must pass up a sufficient force of minesweepers, without which the large ships will be powerless and caught in a deadly trap.

Finally, even if the Fleet or a portion of it is rushed through to the

Marmora, it will not be possible to keep it supplied with coal or munitions or to push an Army up to co-operate with it; and as you yourself so pertinently pointed out in the early discussions on this question, a Fleet by itself can effect very little at Constantinople. Moreover, it would again lose disastrously in returning through the Dardanelles, merely repeating Duckworth's fiasco. We are dealing this time with highly scientific and skilled and trained Germans, and we cannot gamble on any possibility of inefficiency on the part of the defence.

There is the further menace of German submarines daily drawing nearer to the Dardanelles, and certainly acquainted with the mine-fields and able to pass into the Marmora, where they would deal destruction to any of our ships.

For the above brief reasons I cannot, under any circumstances, be a party to any order to Admiral de Robeck to make an attempt to pass the Dardanelles until the shores have been effectively occupied. I consider that purely Naval action, unsupported by the Army, would merely lead to heavy loss of ships and invaluable men, without any reasonable prospect of a success in any way proportionate to the losses or to the possible further consequences of those losses. I therefore wish it to be clearly understood that I dissociate myself from any such project.

Fisher

184: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall

May 11th, 1915

My dear Fisher,

You will never receive from me any proposition to 'rush' the Dardanelles, and I agree with the views you express so forcibly on this subject. It may be that the Admiral will have to engage the forts and sweep the Kephez minefield as an aid to the military operations, and we have always agreed in the desirability of forcing them to fire off their scanty stock of ammunition. But in view of Hamilton's latest telegram this is clearly not required now. And it is my most earnest hope on public and still more on personal grounds that any real issue when presented will find us as always hitherto - united. That shall be my only endeavour.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

We are now in a very difficult position. Whether it is my fault for trying or my misfortune for not having the power to carry through, is immaterial. We are now committed to one of the greatest amphibious enterprises of history. You are absolutely committed. Comradeship, resource, firmness, patience, all in the highest degree will be needed to carry the matter through to victory. A great army hanging on by its eyelids to a rocky beach, and confronted with the armed power of the Turkish Empire under German military guidance: the whole *surplus* fleet of Britain — every scrap that can be spared — bound to that army and its fortunes as long as the struggle may drag out: the apparition of the long-feared submarine — our many needs and obligations — the measureless advantages, probably decisive on the whole war, to be gained by success.

Surely here is a combination and a situation which requires from us every conceivable exertion and contrivance which we can think of. I beg you to lend your whole aid and goodwill, and ultimately then success is certain.

Yours ever,

W.

185: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

May 12th, 1915

Until the military operations have effectively occupied the shores of the Narrows, etc., no naval attack on the minefield can take place. But your letter does not repudiate this, and therefore, in view of our joint conversation with the Prime Minister prior to March 18, I have sent him a copy of my memorandum to you.

With reference to your remark that I am absolutely committed, I have only to say that you must know (as the Prime Minister also) that my unwilling acquiescence did not extend to such a further gamble as any repetition of March 18 until the Army had done their part.

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186: TO H. H. ASQUITH

Admiralty, Whitehall

May 12th, 1915

My dear Prime Minister,

It will be in your recollection that you saw me and the First Lord of the Admiralty in your private room prior to a meeting of the War Council to consider my protest against the Dardanelles undertaking when it was first mooted. With extreme reluctance, and largely due to earnest words spoken to me by Kitchener, I by not resigning (*as I see now I should have done*) remained a most unwilling beholder (and indeed a participator) of the gradual draining of our naval resources from the decisive theatre of war. The absence especially at this moment of the destroyers, submarines, and mine-sweepers in the Dardanelles most materially lessens our powers of dealing with the submarine menace in Home Waters — a menace daily becoming greater, as foreshadowed in the minute [print] I submitted to you six months before the war.

I have sent the enclosed memorandum to the First Lord, and I ask for it to be circulated to the War Council.

Yours truly,

Fisher

187: TO H. H. ASQUITH

May 13th, 1915

Private and Personal

My dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter of yesterday, in which you state that you had been given to understand that an arrangement had been come to between the First Lord and myself, and you kindly added you were very glad. But I regret to say within four hours of the pact being concluded the First Lord said to Kitchener 'that in the event of the Army's failure, the Fleet would endeavour to force its way through', or words to that effect.¹ However, for the moment, with your kind assurance of no such action being permitted, I remain to do my best

¹ See *The World Crisis*, II, 346-7, for Churchill's account of the stormy Admiralty-War Office conference at the Admiralty, when the *Queen Elizabeth* decision was imparted to Kitchener. Churchill gives the date as the evening of May 13th, but Crease believes it took place on the evening of the 12th, and this is borne out by the letter that follows.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

to help the Prime Minister in the very biggest task any Prime Minister ever had — not excepting Pitt and his Austerlitz! Still, I desire to convey to you that I honestly feel I cannot remain where I am much longer, as there is an inevitable and never-ceasing drain *daily (almost hourly)* of our resources in the decisive theatre of the War. But that is not the worst — instead of the whole time of the whole of the Admiralty being concentrated on the daily increasing submarine menace in Home Waters, we are all diverted to the Dardanelles, and the unceasing activities of the First Lord, both by day and night, are engaged in ceaseless *prodding* of everyone in every department afloat and ashore in the interests of the Dardanelles Fleet, with the result of the huge Armada now there, whose size is sufficiently indicated by their having as many battleships out there as in the German High Sea Fleet! Therefore this purely private and personal letter, intended for your own eye alone and not to be quoted, as there is no use threatening without acting, is to mention to the one person who I feel OUGHT to know, *that I feel my time is short!*

Yours truly,

Fisher

188: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 13th, 1915

Secret

Burn.

My dear Jellicoe,

I resigned yesterday over the Dardanelles and the Prime Minister stepped in and temporarily I am remaining, as they have given in (*for the time!*) and the *Queen Elizabeth* is ordered home *at once* with all speed to join you, and also the *Inflexible* on June 12, when completed at Gibraltar. But I've written to the Prime Minister to say I feel my stay is only for a short time longer for two pages of reasons which I gave him! but I won't bore you with more of my private business.

Kitchener came at 6 p.m. last night with all his staff in great majesty and demanded a powerful squadron being stationed in the Humber and the Swin,¹ and objecting to the *Queen Elizabeth*, etc. leaving the Dardanelles. I simply said if the *Queen Elizabeth* was not ordered to leave direct for England at full speed within 12 hours, I

¹ The Swin is a channel off the Essex coast.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

should leave the Admiralty! and as to powerful squadrons being taken from your command (they can't come from anywhere else), we would send the War Office proposals to you for your opinion, and the meeting consisting of Kitchener & Co., First Lord, A. K. Wilson, Oliver, Bartolomé, Graham Greene, and myself, broke up — in disorder! Winston followed me into my room, but I had gone! and Crease told him that if the *Queen Elizabeth* didn't get orders last night to join you, the First Lord this morning would have to get another First Sea Lord!

Yours,

F.

189: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 14th, 1915

My dear Fisher,

I send this to you before marking it to others, in order that if any point arises we can discuss it.

I hope you will agree.

Yours ever,

W.

[Enclosures]¹

First Sea Lord.

1. The fifth 15-inch howitzer with 50 rounds of ammunition should go to the Dardanelles with the least possible delay, being sent by special train across France and re-embarked at Marseilles. Let me have a time-table showing by what date it can arrive at the Dardanelles.

The two 9.2-inch guns will go to the Dardanelles, either in the two monitors prepared for them or separately for mounting on shore. This will be decided as soon as we hear from Vice-Admiral de Robeck.

2. The following 9 heavy monitors should go in succession to the Dardanelles as soon as they are ready: *Admiral Farragut*, *General*

¹ Only the first two of these four minutes are in *The World Crisis* (II, 354-6), but with points 5 and 6 of the all-important first minute (given second in *The World Crisis*) omitted. Churchill has stated the original first minute included only the first four points. The enlarged minute which Fisher saw was, Churchill claims, carried off by the Admiral when he left office. Therefore, 'it was not filed with my other papers and it had passed completely from my mind' (*ibid.* [2nd ed.], p. 557). The full minute is in Crease's letter to Churchill (*ibid.* [2nd ed.], pp. 554-6).

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

Grant, Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, Lord Clive, Prince Rupert, Sir John Moore, General Craufurd, and Marshal Ney.

The first 6 of the 9.2-inch monitors should also go unless the Admiral chooses to have two of their guns for work on shore, in which case the first 4 only will go.

A time-table should be prepared showing the dates on which they can be dispatched and will arrive. They can calibrate on the Turks. All necessary steps for their sea-worthiness on the voyage should be taken.

In the case of the 9.2-inch monitors it may be found better to send the actual guns out to Malta separately.

It is clear that when this large accession of force reaches the Vice-Admiral, he should be able to spare a portion of his battleships for service in Home Waters, but it may be better to see how the monitors work and what use they are to him before raising this point.

3. Four of the 'Edgars' with special bulge protection against the mine and torpedo are now ready. They carry ten 6-inch guns each and supply the medium armament which the monitors lack. They should be specially useful for supporting the Army at night without risk from torpedo attack. They would also be useful at a later stage in passing a shore torpedo tube or escorting other ships that were passing.

We have not found any satisfactory employment for them here.

It is not necessary to provide crews for them: working parties which can take them out will be sufficient. The Admiral can man them from his large Fleet for any special service that may be required. They should start as soon as possible.

Let me have a report on the manning possibilities as defined above and times by which they can arrive.

It will be for consideration when these vessels are on the spot whether a valuable ship like the *Chatham* should not be released for other duties.

4. The Third Sea Lord will make proposals for providing anti-mine protection for a proportion of the battleships employed, on the lines proposed at our discussion.

5. The following increased provision will be made for the Air Service.

(D.A.D. [Director of the Air Division] will supply on verbal instructions.)

6. During this month 5 new Submarines are delivered, viz., *S2*, *E18*, *V2*, *V3*, and *S3*. In June the Montreal boats come in.

Therefore, in view of the request of the Vice-Admiral, I consider that two more E boats should be sent to the Dardanelles.

W. S. C.

14.5.

Secretary.

First Sea Lord.

Although there is good reason to hope that a speedy termination may be reached, it would now be prudent to assume that the operations against the Dardanelles will not take less than three months, and to make all preparations on that basis.

If success is obtained earlier so much the better; but let us make sure that it is not deferred longer. The operations have now reached a point where they may easily develop into a great siege similar to that of Port Arthur, though not so formidable. Our preparations therefore should consider and cover the following points:

1. The provision of siege artillery which could be used against the semi-permanent works, and the mounting on shore of heavy long range naval guns which can from the existing positions held by our troops bring accurate fire to bear on the permanent defences.

2. The provision of landing stages of a semi-permanent character at Seddul Bahr and Gaba Tepe, with cranes, lines of railway and all other facilities for handling large and heavy traffic.

3. Protection against the enemy's Submarines by means of the establishment of regular lines of Indicator nets watched by drifters, joining up Imbros with the Gallipoli Peninsula, and providing permanent protection along the Western coast. In these tideless waters, and with the great quantity of Indicator nets coming to hand there should be no difficulty in this.

4. The battleships of the bombarding Fleet should go by turns to Malta, and there be fitted with the best steel trellis work protection against mines which can be devised. While the present lull in the operations continues, there can be no need to keep the whole Fleet at the Dardanelles, and every opportunity should be taken to afford the ships the necessary protection.

5. Seventy aeroplanes and seaplanes will be required, and preparations must be made to work up to this. Some of the heaviest seaplanes, capable of carrying and dropping 500-lb. bombs, are to be included. I will settle the details of this last provision personally with the D.A.D.

W. S. C.

14.5.15.

First Sea Lord.

Without at all sharing Kitchener's view about invasion, I think the absence of any efficient armoured ship south of the Forth lays our arrangements open to the reproach of incompleteness. The fact that 20 hours would elapse before the Battle Cruiser Fleet could intervene in a landing protected by older battleships at, say, Yarmouth or the Thames, is not fully answered by general assurances, however well founded, of Admiralty confidence, that the enemy will not come. This is not a matter about which I feel strongly, because, like you, I do not think the danger is real. But I would like you to consider without prejudice whether the first and second armoured cruiser squadrons ought not to be based on the Humber as a sound strategic disposition. When the war began and the Germans had more armoured and light cruisers than now, Jellicoe only had two squadrons of armoured and half the number of light and battle cruisers that he now has. He now uses the four squadrons of armoured cruisers (9 of which are heavily armoured vessels) to cover his front in an advance when the battle cruiser Fleet is well to the southward. But if the battle cruiser Fleet gave him one squadron in addition to the new squadron of 'Arethusas' which he has, he would have two armoured and two light cruiser squadrons available for this purpose; which would be sufficient apart altogether from his attached and flotilla cruisers. If the 1st and 2nd armoured cruiser squadrons were placed in the Humber, they would intervene to rupture any landing for certain within a very few hours. They would be well placed to give support to the Light Cruisers in any small affair off the Dutch Coast. They would also rendezvous very comfortably with the battle cruiser Fleet, owing to their relative speeds, at many points S. of the Little Fisher Bank. If this disposition were adopted, I believe the battle Fleet would be equally well served in respect of cruisers. The battle cruiser Fleet could be reinforced for all movements of the kind we have been used to, Tyrwhitt would have a little bone behind him, and security would be given to the coast line against the passage of a Fleet of transports by the occupation in reasonable force of the prime strategic position of the Humber.

Pray think this over, and if you think well of it we might put it to Jellicoe as part of the dispositions which give him the *Queen Elizabeth*. We cannot man the old battleships as I had hoped.

Remember we always intended to put one squadron there, and only delayed it till the First Flotilla was sent North. Two new Light Cruiser Squadrons have arrived. Three more battle cruisers have

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

arrived. *Inflexible* is coming. *Queen Elizabeth* is coming. *Warspite* has come.

W. S. C.

14.5.15.

First Sea Lord.

I am much attracted by the scheme which Commodore Tyrwhitt tells me he has unfolded to you to your satisfaction. The Harwich force should be used as much as possible in the next two or three months for hunting submarines and Zeppelins in the North Sea.

The Commander-in-Chief should also supply a flotilla to work on the Submarine tracks more to the northward.

The method of hunting by 8 or 12 destroyers at a time in what may be called a 'polygon' is extremely interesting, and with deep water and long daylight should yield good results. Commodore T. and the other flotilla to the northward should be laid on the track of the Submarines direct from the Admiralty. Meanwhile the cruisers who will accompany the destroyers will look for the Zeppelins with their guns.

D.A.D. has been told to supply and keep supplied each of the four Harwich cruisers with a 100-mile-an-hour Schneider Cup Seaplane and a good pilot. These can be launched after Zeppelins.

They can also search for Submarines and circle round the extremities of the 'polygon' when a hunt is on. The details of hunting Submarines on this 'Polygon' system should be telegraphed to Vice-Admiral de Robeck, as the deep, clear water of the Mediterranean is specially suited for a well organized seaplane and destroyer hunt. I have asked Commodore T. to draw up a clear, brief account of the method for telegraphing.

W. S. C.

14.5.15.

190: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*

May 15th, 1915

My dear Lord Fisher,

Your letter [No. 188] arrived last night and has perturbed me greatly. I do hope matters will settle themselves satisfactorily, as

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

there is absolutely no one to take your place and I am sure the Government must know it. I am not clear as to the exact point in dispute but I assume it is that you consider the *Q.E.* should no longer be risked on an operation which belongs to older ships, and I am positive the whole Navy would agree with one voice. The public does not realize that our position is slender and that the loss of that margin may mean ruin to the Empire. With SM's increasing rapidly in numbers and power on the German side it is all the more essential to keep and add to our margin, as sooner or later we must expect to lose ships by SM's. We cannot hope to be immune for ever from that risk.

The position is very difficult. I can well understand the anxiety to get at the SM's, we feel it so up here, but until we increase the numbers of our TBD's it is a most difficult matter to use those of 2nd, 3rd and 4th flotillas for the purpose, as it simply means that the heavy ships if moved south, or moved at all, are inadequately screened.

As regards the Humber, I am ready to agree that the 3rd B.S. should go there. I have thought once or twice of proposing it, but the minefields and fogs limit their activity from that base so much that I did not think it worth the move. However, if it will keep people's minds easier, I don't object. They will probably be attacked by Zeppelins and they can't do anything unsupported, except against older ships, but they may give a *feeling* of security, if that is what is desired.

Of course I think it wrong in principle to divide the Battle Fleet, but these 3rd B.S. ships are slow and it is quite possible they might not be with me.

At any rate from the Humber they have the advantage of being inside the Coast minefields and able to move north or south quickly.

Commodore T's SM hunting arrangement is only a development of one I issued at the beginning of the war. It is an improvement on it, but we have not found that any scheme of the sort gives much chance of success because the German SM's can go about *100 miles under water*.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

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191: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

[May 15th, 1915]

First Lord.

After further anxious reflection, I have come to the regretted conclusion I am unable to remain any longer as your colleague. It is undesirable in the public interests to go into details — Jowett said, 'Never explain'¹ — but I find it increasingly difficult to adjust myself to the increasingly daily requirements of the Dardanelles to meet your views. As you truly said yesterday, I am in the position of continually vetoing your proposals.

This is not fair to you besides being extremely distasteful to me.

I am off to Scotland at once, so as to avoid all questionings.²

Yours truly,

Fisher

192: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall

May 15th, 1915

Private and Confidential

My dear Fisher,

The only thing to think of now is what is best for the country and for the brave men who are fighting. Anything which does injury to those interests will be very harshly judged by history, on whose stage we now are.

I do not understand what is the specific cause which has led you to resign. If I did, I might cure it. When we parted last night I thought we were in agreement. The proposals I made to you by minute were, I thought, in general accord with your views, and in any case were for discussion between us. Our personal friendship is and I trust will remain unimpaired.

It is true the moment is anxious and our difficulties grave. But I am sure that with loyalty and courage we shall come through safely and successfully. You could not let it be said that you had thrown

¹ Benjamin Jowett, the Greek scholar and Master of Balliol (d. 1893), had said that the first rule of life was 'never explain'.

² A copy of this letter of resignation, with a brief covering note saying pretty much the same thing, was sent to Asquith that day.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

me over because things were for the time being going badly at the Dardanelles.

In every way I have tried to work in the closest sympathy with you. The men you wanted in the places you wanted them, the ships you designed, every proposal you have formally made for naval action, I have agreed to. My own responsibilities are great, and also I am the one who gets the blame for anything that goes wrong. But I have scrupulously adhered to our original agreement that we should do nothing important without consulting each other. If you think this is not so, surely you should tell me in what respect.

In order to bring you back to the Admiralty I took my political life in my hands with the King and the Prime Minister, as you know well. You then promised to stand by me and see me through. If you now go at this bad moment and thereby let loose upon me the spite and malice of those who are your enemies even more than they are mine, it will be a melancholy ending to our six months of successful war and administration. The discussions which will arise will strike a cruel blow at the fortunes of the Army now struggling on the Gallipoli Peninsula, and cannot fail to invest with an air of disaster a mighty enterprise, which, with patience, can and will certainly be carried to success.

Many of the anxieties of the winter are past — the harbours are protected, the great flow of new construction is arriving. We are far stronger at home than we have ever been, and the great reinforcement is now at hand.

I hope you will come to see me to-morrow afternoon. I have a proposition to make to you, with the assent of the Prime Minister, which may resolve some of the anxieties and difficulties which you feel about the measures necessary to support the Army at the Dardanelles.

Though I shall stand to my post until relieved, it will be a very great grief to me to part from you; and our rupture will be profoundly injurious to every public interest.

Yours ever,

W.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

193: TO ACTING CAPTAIN THOMAS C. CREASE

May 16th, 1915
[early morning]

Dear Crease,

Make three copies of the enclosed letter to Winston, and then give the original to Masterton¹ and beg him to telegraph to Winston not to come up to see me — it is so painful — and *my decision is irrevocable*. Ask the Second Sea Lord to do my work, and the C.O.S. to see the Second Sea Lord instead of me.

I will send for all my gear out of my room to-morrow (Monday) morning — pictures, boxes, etc.

We shall take rooms at an hotel on Tuesday — the Ritz, I think, as the Manager is my devoted friend — I got him the billet — £4,000 a year and all found for his family living at the hotel. *I was a d—d fool not to take it myself!!!* Can't you see me in the restaurant in a white waistcoat and frock-coat!!!

Show the Sea Lords copy of my letter to Winston, also to Hopwood.²

Yours,

F.

Impress on Masterton the utter futility of my seeing Winston.

194: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Admiralty, Whitehall
[May 16th, 1915]

My dear Winston,

The Prime Minister put the case in a nutshell when he stated to me yesterday afternoon the actual fact that I had been dead set against the Dardanelles operation from the beginning! How could it be otherwise when previously as First Sea Lord I had been responsible for the Defence Committee Memorandum [1907] stating the forcing of the Dardanelles to be impossible!³ You *must* remember my

¹ James (afterwards Sir James) E. Masterton-Smith, Private Secretary to successive First Lords of the Admiralty, 1910-1917.

² Sir Francis Hopwood (afterwards first Baron Southborough), Additional Civil Lord of the Admiralty, 1912-1917.

³ See Churchill's comment on this statement in *The World Crisis*, II, 361 n.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

extreme reluctance in the Prime Minister's room in January to accept his decision in regard to the Dardanelles, and at the War Council held immediately afterwards I stated, in reply to a question by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the Prime Minister knew my views and I left the matter to him to explain.

Ever since (as, I fear, to your great annoyance!) I have been, as you truly said the other day, in the unpleasant position of being antagonistic to your proposals, until the series of fresh naval arrangements for the Dardanelles you sent me yesterday morning convinced me that the time had arrived for me to take a final decision, there being much more in those proposals than had occurred to me the previous evening when you suggested some of them.

YOU ARE BENT ON FORCING THE DARDANELLES AND NOTHING WILL TURN YOU FROM IT — NOTHING. I know you so well! I could give no better proof of my desire to stand by you than my having remained by you in this Dardanelles business up to this last moment against the strongest conviction of my life, as stated in the Dardanelles Defence Committee Memorandum.

You will remain. I SHALL GO. It is better so. Your splendid stand on my behalf with the King and the Prime Minister I can NEVER forget, when you took your political life in your hands and I really have worked very hard for you in return — *my utmost* — but here is a question beyond all personal obligations. I assure you it is only painful having further conversations. I have told the Prime Minister I will not remain. I have absolutely decided to stick to that decision. NOTHING WILL TURN ME FROM IT. You say with much feeling that '*it will be a very great grief to you to part from me.*' I am certain you know in your heart no one has ever been more faithful to you than I have since I joined you last October. *I have worked my very hardest!*

Yours,

Fisher

195: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 16th, 1915

My beloved Friend,

I late last night at 10 p.m got a long letter from Winston marked 'Private and Confidential' [No. 192], so I do not forward it, nor shall

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I show it to a soul. I won't remark on it to you, but it absolutely CONVINCES me I am right in my UNALTERABLE DECISION to resign! *In fact I have resigned!* (He talks of a mighty enterprise which will certainly be carried to success!) *Nothing will turn him!* At every turn he will be thinking of the military and not the naval side — *he never has done otherwise.* His heart is ashore, not afloat! *The joy of his life is to be 50 yards from a German trench!*

I want you kindly to tell the Prime Minister distinctly and definitely that *I am no longer First Sea Lord. There is no compromise possible!*

I enclose copy of my letter to Winston [No. 194] to show the Prime Minister. I am not going to see Winston again or anyone else on the subject. And I so much hope you will lead the Prime Minister to see that it is wasting his precious time to have me up before him again on Monday. I have turned over my work to the Second Sea Lord, as is the usual custom. Nothing could have exceeded the kind, I might say affectionate, words to me of the Prime Minister, and I honestly believe that Winston loves me — '*but kind words butter no parsnips*'! I have a humble [honourable?] reputation, and though I feel like 20, yet I'm 74 and so no time to make a fresh reputation if I lose the present one!

Yours,

F.

196: FROM REGINALD MCKENNA¹

36, Smith Square
Westminster
May 16th, 1915

Just back.

The P.M. holds the opinion that your resignation is void until he accepts. Before he does so I am satisfied that he is bound to have your precise grounds definitely formulated in writing and presented to him. If you are up I will come and see you when I have had some food.

R. McK.

¹ This letter was written after McKenna had seen the Prime Minister that afternoon, at Fisher's request, to discuss the situation at the Admiralty.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

197: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

May 16th, 1915

My dear Fisher,

I am touched by the kindness of your letter [No. 194]. Our friendship has been a long one. I remember how in 1908 you tried to bring me to the Admiralty as First Lord. When I eventually came in 1911 I proposed to the Prime Minister that you should return to your old position, and only the difficulties which your enemies were likely to make at that time prevented the accomplishment of my first wish. As it was I followed your guidance in the important decisions which have given us the 15-inch gun and Jellicoe to-day.

Six months ago in the crisis of this great war you came to my aid; since then we have worked together in the very closest intimacy. One difficulty after another has been surmounted; vast schemes of new construction have been carried through; and tremendous reinforcements are now approaching the Fleet. Over the whole range of war-policy and Naval administration there is nothing that I know of on which we are disagreed — except the series of events which have led us into the 'Dardanelles'. Even then we are agreed upon the immediate steps, for I shall not press my wish about reinforcements beyond the point to which you were willing to go — namely the 6 earliest monitors. We are now fully agreed that the Fleet is not to attempt to rush the Narrows but is to support the Army in its gradual advance upon the forts by land. Orders in this sense have been given with which you were in complete accord.

It seems to me that the only course now is to hold on, to go slow, putting as many ships as possible in Malta and the Canal, out of harm's way, and using the destroyers which are out there to hunt the submarines and convoy the army corps which is now starting. If you came into the Admiralty to-morrow for the first time and looked at the problem as it now is, you would advise this as the only practical course. You must feel as I do and as the War Council decided — that whoever may be responsible for the original step, to withdraw now cannot be contemplated.

The announcement of your resignation at this juncture will be accepted everywhere as proof that the military operations as well as the naval at the Dardanelles have failed. The position of the Army which has suffered a loss of 30,000 men in a joint operation will be jeopardized. The admission of failure at the Dardanelles, for so

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

your resignation would be exploited all over the world, might prove the deciding factor in the case of Italy, now trembling on the brink. The knowledge of these facts forces me, not for my own sake (for the fortunes of individuals do not matter now), to appeal to you not to make your resignation operative until at least Italy has declared herself, for which the latest date is the 26th. Meanwhile Sir Arthur Wilson could, if you desire it, do your work.

There ought to be no reproaches between us, and you, my friend, must at this moment in your long career so act that no one can say you were unmindful of the public interests and of the lives of the soldiers and sailors.

In any case, whatever you decide, I claim, in the name of friendship and in the name of duty, a personal interview — if only for the purpose of settling what explanation is to be offered to Parliament.

198: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

May 16th, 1915

Dear Winston,

As usual, your letter is most persuasive, but I really have considered everything and I have definitely told the Prime Minister that I leave to-morrow (Monday).

Please don't wish to see me. I could say nothing, as I have determined not to. *I know I am doing right.*

Fisher

199: FROM THE SEA LORDS

May 16th, 1915

First Lord.

First Sea Lord.

The First Sea Lord has caused us to be informed of his resignation and to be shewn a copy of certain minutes which have passed from the First Lord to him and *vice versa*.

It appears from these documents that Lord Fisher's resignation is due to two causes:

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

(1) Disagreement with First Lord as to the conduct of the naval operations in the Dardanelles

and

(2) Dissatisfaction with the procedure adopted for the executive control of the movements of the Fleet.

With regard to (1) we stated in a minute to the First Sea Lord dated April 8th that we have not sufficient acquaintance with the political situation to enable us to form an opinion as to the correctness of the policy, and this holds good as to the conduct of the operations; but as we said then and now repeat we hold that these operations most certainly jeopardize the crushing superiority of the Grand Fleet which is essential to the successful prosecution of the war.

With regard to (2) we associate ourselves with Lord Fisher, and are of opinion that the present method of directing the distribution of the Fleet, and the conduct of the war by which the orders for controlling movements and supplies appear to be largely taken out of the hands of the First Sea Lord is open to very grave objection.

However dissatisfied we may feel with the present procedure, we recognize that we are faced with a national crisis of the first magnitude and that the disastrous consequences which must inevitably follow on Lord Fisher's resignation must be averted.

Whatever differences of opinion or defects in procedure may have arisen or become apparent should be capable of adjustment by mutual discussion and concession, and we therefore venture to urge you both to consider whether the national interests do not demand that you should follow the advice we have tendered.

F. T. H. F. C. T. T. C. F. L.

200: TO THE SEA LORDS

May 16th, 1915

Strictly Personal and Secret

My dear Friends,

I am obliged by your memorandum. If you knew as much as I did, I AM SURE you would not wish me to remain — but my motto is 'NEVER EXPLAIN' (and always has been).

I've definitely told the Prime Minister I leave the Admiralty to-morrow, Monday.

Yours,

Fisher

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201: TO H. H. ASQUITH

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 17th, 1915

My dear Prime Minister,

I have remained till to-day (Monday) in accordance with your wishes and I now write to say DEFINITELY that I am unable to remain at the Admiralty with Mr. Winston Churchill, and will NOT remain after to-day.

Yours truly,

Fisher

P.S. I have not seen a single visitor of any kind since last Friday except McKenna as authorized by you.¹

202: TO MAURICE BONHAM CARTER²

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 17th, 1915

Dear Bonham Carter,

The messenger who brings this letter also brings a letter to the Prime Minister to say my resignation is *absolute* and DEFINITE and that I leave the Admiralty TO-DAY. With great reluctance I obeyed his wishes to remain till to-day, Monday. I do *so* hope you will persuade him not to waste his time in seeing me, as I am *absolutely determined*.

Yours truly,

Fisher

¹ But Fisher had seen Sir Edward Grey that day. In his notes on the crisis (October 20th, 1919), he wrote: 'On May 17, 1915, having had a visit from [Crease states that the conversation took place *at* the Foreign Office] Sir Edward Grey [who had been asked by the Prime Minister to persuade Fisher to keep quiet and do nothing for a few days], who with the Prime Minister desired my remaining at the Admiralty, I wrote to Mr. Asquith to say definitely I could not remain with Mr. Churchill as First Lord. Sir Edward Grey asked me who I would serve with. I replied, himself (Sir Edward Grey), or Mr. McKenna, but not Mr. Balfour, as he was hand in glove with Mr. Churchill over the Dardanelles adventure.'

² Afterwards Sir Maurice Bonham Carter; Private Secretary to Asquith, 1910-1916.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915
203: TO ANDREW BONAR LAW

May 17th, 1915

Private & Personal

This letter and its contents must not be divulged now or ever to any living soul.

My dear Friend,

In reply to your letter, after repeated refusals by him I have written to the P.M. this morning to say that now my *definite decision* is I am absolutely unable to remain with W. C. (HE'S A REAL DANGER!) *But he is going to be kept* (so I go! *at once, TODAY*), only they are 'forking' me till Parliament rises for 3 weeks or more. I regret to say your A. J. B. has been backing W. C. ALL THROUGH and I have refused to have anything to do with him (A. J. B.) in consequence! *Keep this private.* I must not see you, BUT PARLIAMENT SHOULD NOT RISE TILL THE FACT OF MY GOING IS EXTRACTED. Lots of people must know — for instance, see enclosed from Lord Esher. You might see him at 2 Tilney St., Park Lane, and let his informant be your source of information. *I could not see you — I have seen no one. I have written to no one.*

Yours,

F.

Don't be cajoled *privately* by the P.M. to keep silence. The danger is imminent and VITAL. I don't want to stay, but W. C. MUST go at all costs! AT ONCE. I see Esher's letter is marked 'Private & Secret', so I am unable to enclose it. (Be careful of W. C. with F. E. Smith and others!) Be prepared for the *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*. The P.M. will stick at nothing to keep W. C. *I'm a dead dog! I ceased work last Friday night. W. C. is leading them all straight to ruin. Please send a line by bearer that you have received this letter — AND BURNT IT.* . . . I have not answered Esher's letter or anyone else's or said one single word to a living soul except you, so you must be most prudent and not give me away, but I feel bound to tell you as Leader of the Opposition, because *a very great national disaster is very near us in the Dardanelles!* against which I have vainly protested and did resign long ago, but Kitchener persuaded me to stop. *I was a d—d fool to do so!* (HE ought to have resigned also.) I fancy they will cajole (on supposed public grounds) the others of my colleagues to stay, but as Othello said to Iago, '*My reputation! my reputation!*' and W. C. is a bigger danger than the Germans by a long way in what is just now

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

imminent in the Dardanelles. *Concentrate on the Dardanelles!* Yesterday a member of the Cabinet told me that the present Government is on the verge of being smashed by my going! I DOUBT IT, but I WILL GO!

Please burn and don't mention. Very SECRET AND PRIVATE. This evening Winston sent Lambert, the Civil Lord of the Admiralty, to offer me a seat in the Cabinet if I would return as First Sea Lord with him (Winston) as First Lord!¹ I rejected the 30 pieces of silver to betray my country.

204: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 17th, 1915

Private and Personal

BURN.

Dear Jellicoe,

I have resigned on account of proposed further depletion of our Home resources for the Dardanelles, and also because of absolute incompatibility of view with the First Lord. He is a bigger danger than the Germans! The other Sea Lords agree, but don't resign, and A. K. Wilson takes my place!² Such is life!

Yours,

F.

My decision is final. I've told the Prime Minister, after his repeated refusals of my resignation, that I GO TO-DAY! As Othello said to Iago: 'My reputation! My reputation!'

¹ Apparently Churchill was acting without authority, as Sir Maurice Bonham Carter does not remember any such offer having been made to Fisher (letter to the writer, October 29th, 1954). 'I do not believe for one moment that Lambert was authorized by the Prime Minister to offer Fisher a seat in the Cabinet on any condition or at all. . . . Indeed I am quite sure that no Cabinet post was offered directly or indirectly by Mr. Asquith to Fisher at any time.' It is worth noting that on May 18th *The Times* proposed Fisher as First Lord, an appointment that 'would undoubtedly command great popular approval . . . the suggestion has been frequently made already in many quarters'.

² It was rumoured at the Admiralty during that day (May 17th) that Wilson had been offered Fisher's post and had accepted. This was the case. But Wilson never took over the duties, for he withdrew his acceptance on May 19th upon learning that Churchill was not remaining as First Lord (*The World Crisis*, I, 85). No new Board Patent was issued until Balfour became First Lord on May 27th.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

205: TO ACTING CAPTAIN THOMAS E. CREASE

May 17th, 1915

Dear Crease,

Kindly tell Sir A. K. Wilson and the Sea Lords that Masterton-Smith, who has just been to see me, tells me (*as I KNEW TO BE THE FACT!*) that the information given that the Italians joining the Allies would be prejudiced by my leaving was an UNTRUTH! and the also stated fact about May 26th *equally untrue!* I had exact information that the resignation of the Italian Ministry and Giolitti's Cabinet was all a 'put-up' job to blind the Germans, which it did!

I hope the Sea Lords clearly understand my undoubtedly correct reason for not entangling them, but I *grieve they allowed themselves to be made use of to send me advice which I did not require*, AND IT WAS EXCEEDINGLY BAD ADVICE, and they and Sir A. K. Wilson will clearly see this when the Day of Judgment comes along and all chicanery is exposed!

Was it likely that I did not know all the circumstances!

Yours,

F.

I understand the Patent for the new Board is arranged for and will be read to-morrow evening.

206: FROM H. H. ASQUITH

10, Downing Street
Whitehall, S.W.
May 17th, 1915

Secret

Dear Lord Fisher,

I have your letter of this morning. I feel bound to tell you for your own information only that a considerable reconstruction of the Government is in contemplation, and in the public interest I trust that you will neither say nor do anything for a day or two.¹

Yours sincerely,

H. H. Asquith

¹ Fisher replied that day: 'It's very kind of you to have written to me, as it prevents my going to Scotland to-morrow morning.'

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

207: TO ACTING CAPTAIN THOMAS E. CREASE

May 18th, 1915

To Captain Crease.

PROSPECTIVE.

Get all below written *cut and dried* ready for instant orders being given. (See enclosure.)

I. Arrange for 3rd Battle Squadron and Tottenham's Squadron and suitable destroyer flotilla from other sources for *Humber* with 'Sentinel' Class also there, and section of submarines and strong section of *good* aeroplanes for *some* to be always at sea scouting off the Humber to 100 miles' distance (this to be a STANDING order). Get Sueter¹ to arrange for an ample adequate number of aeroplanes always to be scouting off Humber with new bombs for Zeppelins — *the present ones no use at all!*

II. Also arrange for laying down 3,000 more mines. Get mine-fields exactly marked on *charts*.

III. All these orders to be written out as telegrams ready for signature on 'Der Tag'.²

Keep secret. TELL NO ONE.

F.

P.S. All necessary telegrams for ordering home vessels from Dardanelles except sufficient for Army protection.

[Enclosure]

Get out all enclosed orders in careful detail in telegrams all written out for signature.

Ask Hankey about Army being transported from Dardanelles to Haifa. Get old scheme for this in the C.I.D. prints for landing at Haifa.

We must get out every detail for new policy, all to come like a *clap of thunder!*

Also *coast defence revolution* as arranged by *Le Mesurier*.

Remind me to see Kitchener on 'Der Tag'.

¹ Commodore (afterwards Rear-Admiral Sir) Murray F. Sueter, Director of the Air Department, 1911-1915.

² 'Der Tag' — that is, when the Coalition Government took office and Fisher would take over again.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

208: TO H. H. ASQUITH¹

May 19th, 1915

Preamble

If the following six conditions are agreed to, I can guarantee the successful termination of the War and the total abolition of the submarine menace. I also desire to add that since Lord Ripon wished in 1885 to make me a Lord of the Admiralty, but at my request made me Director of Naval Ordnance and Torpedoes instead, I have served under 9 First Lords and 17 years at the Admiralty, so I ought to know something about it.

1. That Mr. Winston Churchill is not in the Cabinet to be always circumventing me, nor will I serve under Mr. Balfour.

2. That Sir A. K. Wilson leaves the Admiralty and the Committee of Imperial Defence and the War Council, as my time otherwise will be occupied in resisting the bombardment of Heligoland and other such wild projects. Also his policy is totally opposed to mine, and he has accepted the position of First Sea Lord in succession to me, and thereby adopting a policy diametrically opposed to my views.

3. That there shall be an entire new Board of Admiralty, as regards the Sea Lords and the Financial Secretary (who is utterly useless).² *New measures demand new men.*

4. That I shall have complete professional charge of the war at sea, together with the absolute sole disposition of the Fleet and the appointment of all officers of all ranks whatsoever, and absolutely untrammelled sole command of all the sea forces whatsoever.

5. That the First Lord of the Admiralty should be absolutely restricted to policy and parliamentary procedure and should occupy the same position towards me as Mr. Tennant, M.P.,³ does to Lord Kitchener (and very well he does it).

6. That I should have the sole absolute authority for all new construction and all dockyard work of whatever sort whatsoever, and complete control of the whole of the Civil establishments of the Navy.

F.

¹ 'The document [which follows] is new to me . . . [It] seems to show that Fisher used the uncertain course of events at the Dardanelles as a means of making a bid for the supreme naval power' (Churchill to Asquith, September 1927; Asquith: *Memories and Reflections*, II, 111).

² Thomas J. Macnamara, Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, 1908-1920.

³ Harold J. Tennant, Under-Secretary of State for War, 1912-1916.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

The 60 per cent of my time and energy which I have exhausted on 9 First Lords in the past I wish in the future to devote to the successful prosecution of the War. That is my sole reason for the six conditions. These six conditions must be published verbatim so that the Fleet may know my position.

[Enclosure]

MEMORANDUM

*NEW MEASURES DEMAND NEW MEN!*¹

Sea Lords:	Sir A. Bethell Admiral Singer Admiral Inglefield
Chief of Staff:	Abolished! — as First Sea Lord resumes his control as formerly.
Assistants to First Sea Lord:	Captain Jackson Captain Nelson-Ward
Admiral of Coast-Guard, <i>vice</i> Bethell:	Sir Reginald Henderson
Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean:	Sir H. Jackson
Director of Naval Ordnance, <i>vice</i> Singer:	Captain Craig [commanding] <i>Albemarle</i>
Admiral of Minesweeping Service, <i>vice</i> Charlton:	Vice-Admiral Oliver

¹ Of the names mentioned in the memorandum, these are mentioned in this volume for the first time, in the order in which they are named by Fisher: Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Morgan Singer, Director of Naval Ordnance and Torpedoes, 1914-1916; Admiral Sir Frederick Inglefield, at the Admiralty for special duties, 1914-1915; Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Thomas Jackson, Director of the Operations Division, Admiralty War Staff, 1915-1917; Captain (afterwards Admiral) Philip Nelson-Ward, Director of Navigation at the Admiralty, 1913-1916; Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson (ret.), who had commanded the Coastguard and Reserves, 1905-1910; Captain Arthur Waller Craig (who changed his name to Arthur Craig Waller in 1921), commanding the *Albemarle*, 6th Battle Squadron, 1913-1915; Vice-Admiral Sir Martyn Jeram, Commander-in-Chief of the China Station, 1913-1915; Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) W. A. Howard Kelly, commanding the light cruiser *Gloucester*, 1914-1916, whose courageous chase of the *Goeben* had been highly commended by the Admiralty; Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) William C. M. Nicholson, commanding the *Emperor of India*, flag of the Second-in-Command, 4th Battle Squadron, 1914-1915; Commodore, 2nd Class (afterwards Admiral) Oliver Backhouse, commanding the 2nd Brigade, Royal Naval Division, 1914-1915; Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Hugh F. P. Sinclair, Director of the Mobilization Division, Admiralty War Staff, 1914-1916. 'Mitcham' is a complete mystery, though this may be a typographical error in my copy of the document.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

Commander-in-Chief, China, <i>vice</i> Jerram:	Sir S. Colville
For Service at Scapa Flow, <i>vice</i> Colville:	Captain Pelly
For <i>Tiger</i> , <i>vice</i> Pelly:	Captain W. A. H. Kelly, C.B. (late <i>Gloucester</i>).
To <i>Emperor of India</i> , <i>vice</i> Nicholson:	Captain Oliver Backhouse
To be Commodores, 2nd Class:	Captain Webb, C.B., of Trade Division Captain Sinclair, Director of Mobilization.
Break up Naval Division.	
Cancel A. K. W. Mines.	
Recommission 'Apollo' Class.	
Services no longer required:	Admiral Ommanney
Order Home:	<i>Lord Nelson</i> and <i>Agamemnon</i> and ALL midshipmen.
Third Battle Squadron and Mitcham's Squadron to the Humber.	
Increase Aircraft on East Coast.	
Immediately lay down all available mines as they are ready.	

209: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
May 20th, 1915

Secret

My dear Lord Fisher,

I am hoping more than I ever wished for anything in my life before that the fact of your being still in London indicates that the disaster may possibly be averted. I would far sooner lose some ships than see you leave the Admiralty, and though it may be wrong on my part to say so, I feel terribly concerned at the idea of Sir Arthur Wilson succeeding you. The unanimity of feeling on this point amongst senior officers afloat is extraordinary. We all have the greatest possible respect and admiration for him as a seaman, and

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

one who handles a Fleet in a manner second to none, but we all distrust his strategical ideas profoundly, and it would be lamentable were he First Sea Lord. Please forgive plain speaking, and I know this will not go beyond you, but it is useless to mince matters at such a time. I have received your wire and shall probably get your letter early to-morrow morning. You will know without my telling you that I am hoping most earnestly that you will be back at the Admiralty before Saturday and that you will be there with power to carry out your own ideas.

Yours most sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

210: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 21st, 1915

Secret and Private
Burn.

Dear Jellicoe,

I'm precluded from writing by the usual channel, as I am afraid of my letters being opened. *Such a thing has been done in the past!* My mouth is shut, but even if it were open I don't know quite where I am! A. K. Wilson wishes Winston Churchill kept on as First Lord, and in that case he accepts position of First Sea Lord. The Civil Lord came to me three times and offered me a seat in the Cabinet (*he said by authority*) if I would agree to Winston Churchill going back as First Lord. (Macnamara then came also as I was going to bed.) I told them both to take back the 30 pieces of silver they offered me for betraying my Country to the men who had sent them! I've not heard a word from the Prime Minister as yet. Austen Chamberlain, if he is First Lord, is going to take Sir H. Jackson as First Sea Lord. Balfour, owing to my hostility (*I'm told*), has given up his acceptance of First Lord, but my belief is he is coming. Winston, having been ousted from the Cabinet by his own party, has been put back by Balfour as a condition of Balfour's joining the Coalition Government.¹ Winston has hypnotized Balfour. Every sort of intrigue is in progress to cast me out. **I THINK THEY WILL SUCCEED!**

I've been thinking very seriously of war arrangements. Really,

¹ Sir Maurice Bonham Carter, in his letter to the writer of October 29th, 1954, claims this was 'completely without foundation'.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

the one and only man to take charge of Charlton's job is Madden. The mine-sweeping is really **THE** one chief thing in the War *in view of the certainty now (very near us) of every yard of the North Sea being infested with mines*. Charlton is quite unfit for so immense a job, and **MADDEN** is the **ONLY MAN**. Had I remained, I should have made him a vice-admiral and appointed him. *Also EVERETT¹ ought to be on the War Staff!* and you ought to take Dreyer as successor to Madden and someone else as successor to Everett. I've been thinking of this. However, as I am now an outcast, no use talking about such changes.

Yours,

F.

211: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall

May 22nd, 1915

Private

My beloved Jellicoe,

You are right: A. K. Wilson will wreck his country if First Sea Lord! . . .

Yesterday Spender, the Editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, was sent to me on a mission. I told him I would only serve under Bonar Law or McKenna — with either of these I required no guarantees.

Balfour and Winston are inseparable, and have been so since the mad gamble of the Dardanelles was first mooted. I think Balfour is really more to blame than Winston. *Balfour has brought back Winston into the Coalition Government after Asquith had definitely dismissed him from the Liberal Cabinet. THAT'S A FACT!*

Yours always,

Fisher

212: TO REGINALD MCKENNA²

Admiralty, Whitehall

May 22nd, 1915

Private and Personal

My beloved Friend,

Yesterday I sent a message to Bonham Carter to say I would only serve with you or Bonar Law. **WITH EITHER OF YOU I WANT**

¹ Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Allan F. Everett, Captain of the Fleet and Commodore First Class on Jellicoe's staff, 1914-1915.

² An almost identical letter went to Bonar Law that day.

NO GUARANTEES. Balfour has wrecked his own party and now he is going to wreck the Liberal Party, and after that he will wreck his Country! Lambert, the Civil Lord, visited me at half-hour intervals with offers from Winston — the last was a seat for me in the Cabinet *if I would go back with Winston as First Lord!!!* (Macnamara came as I was going to bed!) I told them to take back the 30 pieces of silver offered to me to betray my Country!

It seems to be a *fait accompli* that Balfour is First Lord and A. K. Wilson First Sea Lord, so I shall be off to Scotland. Jellicoe has written me the letter of his life against A. K. Wilson being First Sea Lord, and he says that the whole Fleet is unanimous and very deeply stirred. I can only hope Jellicoe will not resign in consequence. That indeed would bring down the British Empire! (for the matter of that, so will Sir A. Wilson!) . . .

Yours till Hell freezes!

Fisher

213: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe¹

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*

May 22nd, 1915

My dear Lord Fisher,

Your letter reached me a few minutes ago and the messenger is just leaving. I am dismayed at the prospect ahead. The Navy distrusts Mr. Churchill and Sir A. Wilson profoundly. I feel the question is most serious, and if I can help you in any capacity, I am ready and will put aside all personal feelings.

If you go back, I do beg that you will get round you some people

¹ This letter, and the Beatty letter that follows, were expressed by Dorothy Fullerton (second of the Admiral's three daughters) to Dungavel. Fisher replied to Jellicoe on May 25th: '... I am very sensible of your kind words, but there is nothing to be done at all. ... apparently my foes are triumphant.' As regards both letters, the Admiral commented in his notes on the crisis: 'Jellicoe's letter is May 22nd, and the letter from Admiral Beatty (same date) is to the same effect. Both ready to resign if I wish it, which is more than my d—d limpid colleagues, the Sea Lords, did!' It is difficult to see how the Admiral was able to so interpret the letters, but there is this further clue in the same note: 'Mr. McKenna (then Chancellor of the Exchequer), being afterwards at Holyhead, and by chance having his cipher book with him, got a telegram from Sir J. Jellicoe resigning if Mr. Churchill or Sir A. K. Wilson were to be at the Admiralty. I believe a new patent to that effect existed for 24 hours.' This is partly confirmed by a strong follow-up letter from Jellicoe to McKenna (May 23rd) which the present writer has seen and which makes it clear that the dread that Jellicoe and Beatty had of Wilson's strategical ideas would likely have led to their resignation had Wilson succeeded Fisher. But there is no direct mention of Churchill in this letter.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

with recent sea experience, also who are conversant with modern naval warfare. The whole situation has changed in the last two years, and no one but those afloat can fully realize the changed conditions except you yourself. But you can't do everything.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

214: FROM VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

[May 22nd, 1915]

Dear Lord Fisher,

The Commander-in-Chief told me this morning that you had resigned. I cannot believe that it is possible that the Government will accept it. It would be a worse calamity than a defeat at sea. If it is of any value to you to know it, the Fleet is numbed with the thought of the possibility. Please God it is *not* possible. I for one absolutely refuse to believe it.

I have had most useful conversation with the C.-in-C. Would that you could see him at least once a month. Surely it is not impossible. Verily it would be of the greatest possible value and nothing should prevent it.

Yours in fear of the future,

David Beatty

215: FROM H. H. ASQUITH

10, Downing Street
Whitehall, S.W.

May 22nd, 1915
[Postmark: 7.45 p.m.]

Dear Lord Fisher,

I am commanded by the King to accept your tendered resignation of the Office of First Sea Lord of the Admiralty.¹

Yours faithfully,

H. H. Asquith

¹ This was the first communication of any sort that Fisher had from Asquith since the latter's letter of May 17th (No. 206). Fisher commented, in his notes on the crisis: 'Enclosed is a letter from Sir Maurice Hankey [No. 216] telling me that he had seen Mr.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

216: FROM LIEUTENANT-COLONEL M. P. A. HANKEY

Highstead
Pain's Hill, Limpsfield
May 23rd, 1915

My dear Lord Fisher,

I never had a moment to write last night, and have stupidly left your address in town, so you will only get this on Tuesday.

I did not see the Prime Minister until 2 o'clock on Saturday [May 22nd], as he had only then returned from Buckingham Palace. He approved your leave of absence and I asked Crease to wire the news on to you. I am absolutely certain you have done right to go away. Once you enter into controversy you are done, as talking is the politician's trade and they will beat you at it, as surely as you beat the politicians (a whole Ministry, in fact) when it was a question of fighting.

It is irritating and perhaps disastrous that you should have to leave the Admiralty over this wretched affair. If Jackson is First Sea Lord, though, we shall have a level-headed man in charge and must hope for the best. In the meantime I hope that you will take a thorough rest after the tremendous and unfair strain that has been put upon you, and prepare yourself for the day when the country calls on you. Meanwhile, much of your good work will be bearing fruit, and the tremendous fillip you have given to the Admiralty will carry us on for a bit. Anyhow you must reserve your energies, and not dissipate them in barren controversies.

Thanking you once more for all the confidence you have reposed in me.

I am, Yours ever,

M. P. A. Hankey

Asquith, the Prime Minister, at 2 p.m. that day, May 22, 1915, who approved of his [Fisher's] leaving London for Scotland, but not one least bit of a hint as to Mr. Asquith at 7.45 p.m. that same evening sending me a curt letter of five lines . . . Note! Not the faintest expression of regret, or reference to work at the Admiralty. . . . Mr. Bonar Law wrote me a letter on May 22nd, 1915, which distinctly indicated that he did not know the Prime Minister was going to send me the letter he did on May 22nd, 1915 (the same day, that is, and posted at 7.45 p.m.).' One of his first letters from Scotland to Lady Fisher (May 24th?) spoke of the 'VERY curt letter' from Asquith, but added: '*I quite expected all this to happen. It's no use whining!*'

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

217: TO LADY FISHER

Dungavel
Strathaven, Lanarkshire
May 26th, 1915

Dearest Kitty,

I feel quite ashamed of being here in such great luxury while all of you are topsy turvy packing up, and all going through so much bother and worry while I am here in extreme luxury, *with a suite of apartments fit for a King!* with most lovely views and heavenly air and the utmost welcome you can imagine. They are bent on my remaining on here *for any length of time I like!* (and I am sure they mean it!), and in my present frame of mind it's most conducive to my peace of mind to remain isolated at this out of the way place. I don't answer any letters, nor do I write to anyone either. *I don't know what to say and so say nothing!*

The Sea Lords and A. K. Wilson have all behaved very badly to me indeed, *but I let it all pass!*¹ It would have been intolerable my remaining on with W. C. (in the Cabinet) *always circumventing me* and Mr. Balfour all the time in Winston Churchill's pocket! The position was simply *impracticable and impossible!* *The real culprit is Mr. Balfour!* as Mr. Asquith had definitely dismissed Winston Churchill (he told me this) and Winston Churchill had begun to pack up to go to France, when Balfour insisted on Winston Churchill being retained in the Cabinet, as he, Balfour, felt that by backing him up as he had done since January, he (Balfour) was the cause of Winston Churchill being booted out! However, keep all this to yourselves. . . .

Y. l. h.²

J. F.

I have been out on the moors, which are close round the house, and the grouse are at the very door. I am going trout-fishing with the Duke. He catches them by the dozen!

¹ 'I imagine from all I hear that if the Sea Lords had stuck to me, and Sir A. Wilson also, that the results would have been widely different' (Fisher to Crease, May 26th, 1915).

² Your loving husband.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

218: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Dungavel

May 29th, 1915

Private and Personal

My angelic Pamela!

I've been going through the fiery furnace since I last saw you, but first of all let me congratulate you on our dear Reggie '*going up higher*' when the intrigue was under weigh for him to '*go out*'! *What a sell for the intriguers!*¹

For myself I have been out-manœuvred! On Monday, May 17, when the Prime Minister wrote me a secret letter that he was going to reconstruct the Government and so inferred that Winston would not be in the Cabinet, I was in the ascendant, and had I left it all there I should presumably have prospered, but in the innocence of my heart I wrote out conditions that in my view made for success in the conduct of the war and the abolition of the submarine menace. I will send you a copy another day, but quite likely you have seen them, and up to 2 p.m. on Saturday, May 22, the Prime Minister did not give me any idea of his hostility thereto and approved of my coming to Scotland, but the same afternoon he sent a curt dismissal, so I rather suppose something sudden occurred or he would have made some remark as to my leaving for Scotland. Nevertheless, the position was really impossible with Winston retained in the Cabinet circumventing me, and Balfour as his facile dupe over the Dardanelles, which are bleeding the Navy and the Army both white. Well! least said, soonest mendest, so no more!

I'm in rude health and feel sad not to be helping in the War. I am ready to come back at a moment's warning. Please bear this in mind.

Yours affectionately,

Fisher

219: TO LADY FISHER

Dungavel

[late May 1915]

Dearest Kitty,

. . . The 'KNOW-ALLS' consider *I have done right!!!!* THAT ought to satisfy you! . . . It's most interesting your telling me that Balfour had

¹ Reginald McKenna had become Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Coalition Cabinet, 1915-1916.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

been up to see Jellicoe! I sent you Lambert's letter where he told me Balfour had gone up to the Grand Fleet to try and get a First Sea Lord, but without success! I've had a telegram from Jellicoe to say he is with me heart and soul and will do anything I wish him. Well! I wish him to stop where he is! . . .

I really don't think I could have done anything else but what I have done. Cheer up and keep up your spirits. Everyone here *down to the baby* is wonderfully kind and sympathetic. I wish you were here, it's so lovely.

Y. l. h.

J. F.

220: TO LADY FISHER

Dungavel
[May 31st? 1915]
5 a.m.

Dearest Kitty,

. . . Dorothy's excellent comparison with 'comic opera' has apparently come off, as Balfour is preferred. I am so thankful to be so absolutely out of reach of interviews and snapshotters! Do you remember how at Kilverstone they used to come down and haunt the house? but here I am quite inaccessible, as you must come 22 miles in a motor from Glasgow or Kilmarnock. . . .

I've not heard one word of explanation from anyone as to what occurred. This is a copy of Mr. Asquith's letter to me. . . . *It couldn't well be shorter!!!* It was posted at 7:45 p.m. on Saturday. Apparently Mr. Asquith saw the King at noon on Saturday, so it must have been settled then, and I see by the *Daily Mail* that W. C., after saying farewell to everyone on Friday, went back again to the Admiralty on Saturday afternoon. It is all very incomprehensible, *but I am not going to say one single word* or answer any speeches or letters on the subject, and I shall stay here, where I am isolated from all possibility of being interviewed. I expect you will prefer to go to Kilverstone, where I will come later on, and I can get there via York without coming through London.

Y. l. h.

J. F.

Nothing will ever induce me to go to London again till the War is over!

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

221: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

Dungavel
May 31st, 1915

Private

My dear Jellicoe,

I am being pestered by masses of friends (known and unknown) to 'explain', *but I'm not going to say one word* (not even if lies are told about me! *and that seems probable!*).

What I am writing to you about is the very pressing subject of meeting the Zeppelin menace. Had I been kept on, I had laid all my plans for getting back from France and the Dardanelles all our aircraft and reorganizing the East Coast air service so as to deal with the enemy's aircraft. It's simply scandalous, owing to Winston Churchill having denuded us of all the efficient aircraft for other services, how the enemy's Zeppelins reconnoitre and attack us as they do, so I hope you will see to this in any communications you may have with Mr. Balfour. With Winston Churchill still in the Cabinet circumventing me, and Mr. Balfour consulting W. C. at every turn, it was just an impossibility for me to have remained on. And also the Dardanelles was bleeding the Navy white and bleeding the Army white also. They wrote me from the Admiralty that Balfour was going up to see you. I've no doubt you rubbed in the truth! Mr. Balfour got W. C. put back into the Cabinet. He was out of the Cabinet (*the Prime Minister told me so*), and Winston told Masterton-Smith this and had packed up his gear to go to France and join Sir John French! but Mr. Balfour got him back, hence I could not remain.

Yours,

Fisher

A. K. Wilson at the Admiralty is a REAL danger! While I was there it did not signify, as I nullified him.

222: FROM ADMIRAL SIR HENRY JACKSON

Admiralty, Whitehall
May 31st, 1915

Dear Lord Fisher,

It is very nice of you to write me such a nice letter on the change that is taking place, and I very much appreciate it.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

I fancy there is no senior officer who less desired the appointment than I. The Mediterranean was my chief desire, especially since Xmas.

My wife is delighted with the house, and the great trouble your daughters have taken to turn it over to her in the nicest state and the nicest way possible. I was glad to meet them this morning though it was only to say good-bye.

I've no intention of being influenced by the past or allowing myself to be influenced by outside members of the Government, but I feel I have a very difficult job before me, for which I am not fully qualified; but I shall do what I can and remember many of *your old maxims*.

I'm off to Scotland to-night to meet Jellicoe and have a talk with him, and it will be some days before I really settle down in this chair.

I hope you'll have a good rest from your worries, and you can always have the satisfaction that your last coup did as much, if not more, for the country than any of your previous ones, even if it has temporarily appeared to be a repulse to yourself, which I don't think is the case.

With many thanks,

Yours sincerely,

H. B. Jackson

223: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Dungavel

June 3rd, 1915

My beloved Jellicoe,

Your letter just come and I am greatly touched by it! . . . McKenna and others seem perfectly sure I shall return to Admiralty, as both Balfour and Jackson are very weak in health. (Thank goodness I am at the present moment really as strong and full of 'go' as ever before in all my life!) *But I have no illusions!* for I do not think the politicians of either side will EVER permit me to get back into office. . . . They know my battle-cry: '*Untrammelled naval control of the War!*' I believe Bonar Law and McKenna are with me, but none else!¹ What I regret is the indecisive paltering with the Dardanelles

¹ Two days later, to Pamela McKenna: 'I do not think the Prime Minister or the King will ever agree to my coming back, but if Balfour and Jackson break down in health, as is likely, then *force majeure* may bring it about.' On the same day, to a correspondent whose name does not appear on the copy of the letter: 'I see no prospect of returning - unless there is a disaster!'

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

question and with the submarine question. *Both require very drastic and immediate treatment!* General Callwell, the Director of Military Operations,¹ fully agreed with all my views on the morning of May 22 (the day I left London), BUT as usual the politician steps in and *murders fighting efficiency*, and that was the *keynote* of my leaving the Admiralty: no interference with fighting efficiency! No doubt, had I complied with the wishes of the emissary sent to me by the authorities and climbed down a bit, I would have been still First Sea Lord, but I am able to say I did not consult my own interests. In six months you will have the big navy laid down since October 30. My mouth waters at the thoughts of the hundreds of vessels you will have added to your strength, especially the five fast battle cruisers *Renown*, *Repulse*, *Glorious*, *Furious*, *Courageous* — the *Furious* with 18-inch guns and 2-ton projectiles and a range over 17 miles, and all of them with only 21 feet draught of water and 33 knots speed. Hip, hip, hurrah!

Yours for evermore,

F.

224: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Dungavel

June 5th, 1915

Private and Personal

Dear Mr. Balfour,

I am writing these few lines for your eye alone. Now that you are settled at the Admiralty I wish to write a few lines to explain my position to you. I felt the Dardanelles were undermining our supremacy in the decisive theatre of the War in the North Sea, and there seemed to be no way out but the course I took. Sir E. Grey said I wrecked the Government! *It was better to wreck the Government than the Navy!* As you were quoted as supporting the continuance of the Dardanelles project (with what I do not doubt excellent non-naval reasons), it seemed hopeless my accepting service under you, but I gather now that I had a wrong impression of your views. You may say to me, Why did you not seek an interview with me and so assure yourself? *I admit I should.* I wanted also, in writing this letter, to say to you that I have had such very excellent letters from Sir

¹ Major-General (afterwards Sir) Charles E. Callwell, Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, War Office, 1914-1916.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

John Jellicoe and Sir H. Jackson that I feel happy and reassured and impelled to tell you so.

If ever you send Sir H. Jackson as Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, which he tells me is the object of his desire, as he is pre-eminently fitted for it at this critical time when another stamp of Admiral is required to pick up the pieces, then I am unconditionally at your service.

Yours very truly,

Fisher

I do hope you will study the qualities of all the vessels laid down since I came to Admiralty on October 30 — a veritable Armada, especially the 5 battle cruisers, all of which should be fighting next April, with their 33 knots speed and only $21\frac{1}{2}$ feet draught of water, and 15-inch and 18-inch guns (projectiles of 2 tons and 17 miles range!).

But there are other mighty things also impossible to write about which will vitally influence the War if only pursued with unflinching determination.

225: FROM ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Admiralty, Whitehall

June 6th, 1915

My dear Lord Fisher,

It is — I need hardly tell you — a very great pleasure to me to hear that you are 'happy and reassured' by the letters which Sir John Jellicoe and Sir H. Jackson have written you. I know how high is the esteem in which you hold these distinguished officers on whom I must so greatly depend if I am to do any good in a position which I was the last to seek and which I have undertaken with much reluctance and some misgiving.

As regards the Dardanelles the operations have now become in the main *military*: the course of events has put the fleet in a secondary position, so that what 'I understand' was your view is now being carried out. I hope we may avoid any further serious naval losses — all precautions are being taken.

There is one phrase in your letter which might be taken to indicate that the whole expedition should be abandoned. But this I feel sure does not express your settled conviction.

I have not had time thoroughly to master your proposals for naval

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

construction but I have studied it enough to see that the brain which designed the Dreadnoughts has not lost its cunning.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour

226: TO KING GEORGE V

Dungavel

June 7th, 1915

Lord Fisher's humble duty and he desires to submit to Your Majesty that when advised to leave London at short notice on Saturday, May 22, there was then no indication (as the Prime Minister approved of his leaving London) that the same evening Lord Fisher would receive his dismissal from the Admiralty, for certainly Lord Fisher would have begged of Your Majesty a few moments in which to take leave. Your Majesty will probably quite understand how events so moved as to preclude the situation at the Admiralty being continued, and if conditions were laid down which were considered impossible by those in authority, there was no other course possible than the one that was taken.

With my humble duty I remain Your Majesty's humble Servant,
Fisher

I trust Your Majesty may be pleased to keep this letter strictly private and personal, as I have no desire for any controversy.

227: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Dungavel

[June 10th, 1915]

My beloved Pamela,

My hosts inviting you here was spontaneous! It was not an under-hand dodge of mine to get you both here!

I've had a nice letter from our friend Donald. He says my memorandum to the Prime Minister upset him and stopped the negotiations.¹ No doubt it was unwise of me, but I was only thinking

¹ Robert (afterwards Sir Robert) Donald, Editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, 1902-1918, had written: 'I have been discussing the situation with good friends of yours, and they seem to be inclined to the opinion that the conditions in your memorandum upset the Prime Minister and stopped negotiations.'

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

of the success of the War and of dishing the submarines! As Mr. Balfour has made me happy by his communications with Sir H. Jackson and Sir John Jellicoe, I've told him I am ready to take Jackson's place if Jackson goes as Commander-in-Chief to Mediterranean, the appointment he greatly desires, and for which he is pre-eminently fitted, when the time comes for Admiral de Robeck to be relieved by an officer of higher rank! So I've made myself right I hope with Mr. Balfour, who, as you know, was always my great friend. I felt bound to do this without delay. To write to the Prime Minister I hesitate. Perhaps you will think it over.

*'Tempus edax rerum.'*¹

Yet a word in season may remove harsh feelings never intended to be aroused. I enclose specimen of letter, but I am not in love with it, except I wish in all ways to remove the malignant idea that is prevalent that I ran away from the Admiralty instead of sticking to the War in spite of all personal feelings.

Yours for evermore,

F.

P.S. *Private*. Sir H. Jackson is now in bed, very ill, I hear!

I've changed my mind and written to Mrs. Asquith and you can post it if you approve.

Please read *John Bull* of June 12.²

Just heard he is well again — congestion of the lungs and bleeding.

[*Letter (unposted) to Mrs. Asquith, attached to foregoing letter*].

Dungavel

[June 10th, 1915]

My dear Friend,

In memory of happy waltzes in the past, will you kindly put me right with the Prime Minister, as, like Moses, '*I spake unadvisedly*',³ or rather, I *wrote* unadvisedly! And consequently I am only going to

¹ 'Time the devourer of all things', from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

² A leading article in *John Bull*, entitled 'Lord Fisher — Striker!' 'In the hour of supreme national need the chosen of the nation, the skilled architect of our naval fortunes, has quitted the post of duty, leaving his job half done. . . . It was a cruel, wanton, reckless blow at the heart of the nation . . . a shocking example to set the hundreds of thousands of men of lesser station, and lesser responsibility . . . Is it too late to appeal to Lord Fisher to repent his hasty action? . . . There is only one pardon, and the path of reparation leads straight back to Whitehall. There Lord Fisher would still be warmly welcomed, and by the nation at large his reinstatement would be hailed with joy. Again we insist that his King and Country need him. What is his reply?'

³ *Psalms* cvi, 32-3.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

see the Promised Land of 'Success in the War' from this Pisgah where I now am!

I have had such nice letters from Sir John Jellicoe and Sir H. Jackson that I felt impelled to write to Mr. Balfour to express my happy and reassured feelings, and he sent me a very kind reply. I sincerely desire to place myself back again in the good estimation of the Prime Minister. Please manage it for me, with my regret for my memorandum to him!

Yours,

Fisher

I had a vivid dream last night of the Prime Minister upbraiding me, and this has really caused this letter!

228: FROM KING GEORGE V

Buckingham Palace
June 10th, 1915

Dear Lord Fisher,

I thank you for your letter of 7th inst. received this morning and in accordance with your wishes it will be treated as strictly private and personal. I was unaware of the circumstances to which you allude and I certainly would have been glad to see you before you left London.

Nobody regrets more than I do that a situation should have arisen at the Admiralty which resulted in changes which have now taken place.

I wish to express my appreciation of the great services which you have rendered to the Navy while you have been at the Admiralty.

I am so pleased to hear that it is your desire that there should be no controversy with regard to those services having now come to an end.

Believe me, Very sincerely yours,

George R. I.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

229: TO KING GEORGE V

Dungavel
June 11th, 1915

Lord Fisher's humble duty, and Your Majesty's gracious approbation of his services at the Admiralty is very greatly valued, and it is much to be hoped that no more public speeches will be made to fan into a flame what had best die out, in regard to the endeavour to rush the Dardanelles as a purely naval operation, hence losing all the advantages of a surprise attack when the military perforce had to intervene and the Germans had been given time to make great preparations, resulting in our losing 30,000 men in the first 4 days! and a total of six battleships!

Many valued friends have advised the circulation of a confidential statement to dispose of the charge of running away from duty, *but nothing short of the act of resignation would have led to a change of First Lord!* In the deepest confidence the following extract from Sir H. Jackson's letter may be quoted to Your Majesty: 'You can always have the satisfaction that your last coup did as much if not more for the country than any of your previous ones, even if it has temporarily appeared to be a repulse to yourself, which I don't think is the case.' Those are Sir H. Jackson's written words.

Lord Fisher begs to enclose for Your Majesty's private and personal use only a list of 593 vessels of every type laid down since his advent at the Admiralty on October 30 last. Such an Armada — *a veritable Armada it is* — has never in the memory of man or the annals of the world been devised and constructed in so short a time, as they will all be fighting next spring — every one of them new in type and revolutionary in design and all worked out for a specific strategic idea. Is it conceivable that the author of such a scheme would have left the scene of his labours and the fruition of his plans of sleepless nights and unceasing work for any reason short of vital injury to the Navy unless the First Lord was changed?

I remain Your Majesty's humble Servant,

Fisher

[Enclosure]

N.B. All the officers and crews for these vessels have been organized in advance together with all their munitions.

Vessels ordered to be built since Lord Fisher came to the Admiralty on October 30, 1914:

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

5 *Battle Cruisers* — 33 knots speed — 15-inch and 18-inch guns, and only 21 feet draught of water. (*Queen Elizabeth* draws 35 feet.)
N.B. These vessels will be fighting next Spring!

2 Light Cruisers, 3,000 tons each.

5 Flotilla Leaders of 30 knots and 1,500 tons each.

56 Destroyers.

65 Submarines.

24 Airships.

45 Monitors, 15-inch to 6-inch guns.

12 Light draught gunboats, 4.7-inch guns.

2 Coast Defence ships.

24 sloops of 24 knots and 1,100 tons.

19 Whaling Steamers, 500 tons each, for submarines.

24 Patrol Steamers, 22 knots speed.

50 Seagoing Motor Vessels.

260 Barges with oil engines for troops.

Total, 593 vessels.

Also 5 battleships altered to oil from coal and their armament improved.

230: FROM KING GEORGE V

Buckingham Palace

June 12th, 1915

Dear Lord Fisher,

I send you these few lines to say that I have safely received the very important letter which you wrote to me yesterday. You may be sure I shall treat it in the strictest confidence.

I am most grateful for the very interesting list of the 593 vessels of every type, laid down by you since you went to the Admiralty at the end of October. It is indeed an Armada, and will be a testimony of your zeal, foresight and knowledge with regard to our naval requirements in order to bring this terrible war to a victorious conclusion.

Believe me, Very sincerely yours,

George R. I.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

231: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Dungavel
June 14th, 1915

My dearest Pamela,

Please burn my letter to Mrs. Asquith. How glad I am I wrote to you! *She always swears to me she is my dearest friend!* I won't write at all to the Prime Minister or anyone else either. The situation rests with Mr. Balfour entirely (*so it appears to me!*). If Sir H. Jackson (as he, Jackson, so earnestly wishes) goes to the Mediterranean, then Balfour can have me back as First Sea Lord (*as I have told him I will come*), but that part of my letter Balfour did not reply to. Of course every day that passes makes my return more unlikely, because things settle down and one is no longer missed! However, I agree with you there is nothing to be done but *patiently wait!* I really am most grateful to you both!

Yours always,

Fisher

232: TO MRS. R. W. LOVETT

Dungavel
June 16th, 1915

Dear Mrs. Lovett,

I am still here with the Duke and Duchess of Hamilton, and they want me to live here for ever!!! I have a charming suite of rooms and every comfort the mind of man can desire. Nevertheless, I am very sad at being out of it all, when I can't help thinking I am the one who ought to be arranging the job. That sounds very egotistical, but it's true! Of course, everyone thinks I am going back, *but I cherish no such illusion!* I have no plans for the future and have no ideas of what will happen. Many people think the War will last another 3 years! I am literally avalanched with letters begging me to go back, but I can't go back if they won't have me! . . .

I will write again soon. I am too sad at present.

Yours,

F.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

233: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Dungavel
June 18th, 1915

Dear Mr. Balfour,

This morning I have received from my dear friend Garvin, the Editor of the *Observer* [1908-1942], such a convincing indictment of my sin and wickedness in being here doing nothing, when I ought to be at your beck and call, that I at once *without any reservations whatever* place myself at your disposal, and am quite ready to come at once to Admiralty in the same position as Sir A. K. Wilson occupies — namely, to give advice *when asked* and to be silent *when not asked*! Garvin quotes with immense effect on me Sir Geoffrey Hornby's¹ famous reply, 'It's for you to say whether you want the Dardanelles forced. It's for me to carry it out.' I adopt that great Admiral's words. I can't say any more. So the sooner you telegraph for me to come up, the better I shall be pleased and the sooner will be terminated the endless accusations the daily post brings me that I am a deserter! Of course you know me so well that you can't doubt my will to please you and help you.

Yours truly,

Fisher

234: FROM ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

June 21st, 1915

My dear Lord Fisher,

Your offer of service is just what I should have expected of you. How or in what way the country can best take advantage of it, it is not easy to see. There is — as you know better than any man — no natural job for you to fill in this office and the very fact that you have been twice First Sea Lord, and had on each occasion left a deep impress upon the policy of the Board, obviously does not help matters. Nevertheless I shall be deeply disappointed if no sphere of activities can be found for your naval genius.

Perhaps you will allow me a little time to think the matter over.

Yours very sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour

¹ Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral of the Fleet Sir) Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, 1877-1880, took the Fleet through the Dardanelles to Constantinople in February 1878, during the Russo-Turkish War.

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

235: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Dungavel
June 23rd, 1915

Dear Mr. Balfour,

Many thanks for your kind letter. I await your good intentions and quite understand there may be delay, but I hope it may not be long, as I am very ready for work. I have been busy looking up the new vessels building on the Tyne and on the Clyde and in consequence very much wish to be back at the Admiralty to give a much required 'impetus' in all directions, as there is a 'slacking up'!

Yours very truly,

Fisher

The idea just occurs to me that I might be given the oversight of this mass of new vessels and their readiness for war at the earliest possible moment and all their fighting paraphernalia!

236: TO MRS. ERIC FULLERTON

Dungavel
June 24th, 1915

Dear Dolly,

... *It's not a bit of use to fret and worry!* The War is going to last three years. *There is lots of time therefore for things to happen!* The past can't be undone. Unless I had written those peremptory conditions to the Prime Minister, W. C. would still have been at the Admiralty. It was better to wreck myself than wreck the Navy! Perhaps it would have been best had I seen the Prime Minister instead of writing! Balfour and Winston Churchill are pledged up to the hilt to see the Dardanelles through. If they can get Bulgaria it will be possible, but not without, judging from what one hears. Sir Ian Hamilton's wife told someone that her husband was hard pressed. However, if only we pour in enough troops I suppose we shall win eventually. . . .

We had Mr. Gracie¹ here yesterday to lunch from the Fairfield Works at Glasgow, where they are building my new *Renown*. He

¹ Alexander (afterwards Sir Alexander) Gracie, Managing Director of the Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company.

RESTORATION AND ABDICATION, 1914-1915

said he was at the Admiralty last Friday and 'that there was absolute apathy throughout the building', and not only that but there was a distinct going back in shipbuilding and everyone was saying to him I was bound to come back! I fear this only sympathy!

Your loving father,

F.

237: FROM ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Admiralty, Whitehall
June 26th, 1915

Private

My dear Lord Fisher,

There *is* a position — though I am by no means sure that you would consent to take it — where your great powers of original thought, combined with your unique experience, would enable you to do great service to the Navy and the Country. Its character is explained in the accompanying Memorandum. If you could see your way to accepting the position of Chairman to the new Inventions Committee you would, I am convinced, be doing a great public service.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour

238: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Dungavel
June 28th, 1915

Dear Mr. Balfour,

Your kind words leave me no option but to accept the position of Chairman of the Board you mention. I am ready to come any moment you tell me.

Yours very truly,

Fisher

ABDICATION, MAY 1915

239: TO ACTING CAPTAIN THOMAS E. CREASE

June 29th, 1915

My dear Crease,

. . . Sir Ian Hamilton's wife two nights ago told a friend of mine that her husband found the Dardanelles a most serious job. I heard also from others just returned from Dardanelles that with the greatest luck it would only be possible to get to the Narrows by October and to Constantinople in a year! But only wonderful luck would do this! So if I am not going back till the Dardanelles business is settled, my return is a long way off!!!

No doubt it would have been best had I seen the Prime Minister instead of writing, but I was badly advised in an influential quarter. However, *no use crying over spilt milk!* . . .

Altogether the situation is plainly unfavourable for my return, and the idea of Sir H. Jackson going to the Mediterranean is quite disposed of by the facts you quote. Sir H. Jackson told Sir P. Watts¹ on Friday that he was looking for an opportunity to leave the Admiralty, '*but would never leave unless the right man took his place*', which dear old Watts inferred was me!!! . . .

Yours,

F.

¹ Sir Philip Watts, onetime Director of Naval Construction (1901-1912), adviser on naval construction to the Board of Admiralty, 1912-1916.

PART TWO

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

CHAPTER I

THE BOARD OF INVENTION AND RESEARCH, 1915-1916¹

FISHER was not inactive for long. On July 5th he was induced by 'exceeding cordial letters' from Asquith and Balfour to take up the chairmanship of the newly established Board of Invention and Research, whose task was defined as 'responsibility for organizing and encouraging scientific effort in relation to the requirements of the Naval Service'. The 'general superintendence' of the B.I.R. was reserved to the First Lord of the Admiralty, but with the Third Sea Lord responsible 'in all technical and departmental matters'. This was altered in April 1917, when the B.I.R. was entirely assigned to the Controller.

The B.I.R. was run by a Central Committee consisting of Fisher and three scientists of renown. The actual work of the Board was divided into six sections, each with sub-committees staffed with technical experts: (i) airships, aeroplanes, seaplanes, and aeronautics generally; (ii) submarines, mines, searchlights, wireless telegraphy, and general electrical, electro-magnetic, optical, and acoustic subjects; (iii) naval construction, marine engineering, oil fuel, protection of ships against torpedo and mine; (iv) anti-aircraft devices, primarily for use on ships; (v) explosives, noxious gases, and miscellaneous; (vi) armament of aircraft, bombs, and bomb sights. There was also a consulting panel of twelve (later thirteen) scientific experts and a Secretariat of six (later eight) civilians and naval officers, which dealt with the preliminary sifting of proposals from inventors and others, the general correspondence of the Board, the arrangements for special inquiries, experiments, etc., and the financial side of the work. Some of the specific problems worked on included the use of non-inflammable gases for rigid airships, smoke clouds for obscuring airships, sound detection and location, and self-sealing tanks for aircraft. These were among the problems of Section (i), Airships Sub-Committee. Section (ii) work included the detection and location of enemy submarines by electro-magnetic methods, optical methods, thermal, acoustic, etc. The problems were of three

¹ On Fisher's last years, see *Memories*, pp. 22-3, 29-32, 45-8; *Records*, pp. 64-8, 245-6; and especially Bacon: *Fisher*, II, 285-315, and Sir J. J. Thomson: *Recollections and Reflections* (New York, 1937), pp. 206-21.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

kinds: those set by the Admiralty, original research carried out by the B.I.R., and the investigation of proposals put forward by inventors and other members of the general public. Between July 5th, 1915, and December 31st, 1916, a grand total of 20,698 inventions were submitted to the B.I.R. The work of the B.I.R. in time became almost entirely confined to exploring solutions of the submarine problem.

The Admiral entered into his duties with his usual zest: the appointment 'promises to be a very big affair,' he wrote Cecil Fisher (July 6th), 'as apparently I shall be able to direct big policies . . .' He was further heartened by the more than two thousand letters he received in the four days following the announcement of the appointment, proof that he retained the confidence of a large section of the public. Characteristically, he renamed the house in Cockspur Street where the B.I.R. had its offices, Victory House. The experimental work was conducted at Harwich.

Sir Joseph Thomson has left an interesting description of Fisher as Chairman of the B.I.R.

I never came across anyone with such pronounced personality, nor with such extraordinary driving power. His method was that of the mailed fist rather than the gloved hand, and in carrying out his schemes he made many enemies and hurt many people's feelings. When different schemes came before him he spent very little time in determining which should be chosen, and in his choice he seemed to be guided by instinct rather than by reason. When he had made his choice, his whole energies were thrown into carrying it into effect. This was a great contrast to the practice I had been accustomed to in University matters. In these, much time and energy is spent in discussing what scheme should be adopted, so much so that one is apt to be tired of the scheme before it is started, and to be languid in carrying it out. There can be no question which is the better method in war-time. Lord Fisher had foresight and imagination as well as energy. He could see the potentiality of inventions which in their early stages had been nothing but failures. He envisaged what service they might render if the purely mechanical difficulties were overcome, as there was a good chance they might be by skill and perseverance, and he did all in his power to expedite this process.¹

¹ Thomson, *Recollections and Reflections*, pp. 217-18.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

But he was not happy in his new role and became increasingly bitter. The post was a purely advisory one and offered little scope for his energy and his genius.

My three Super-Eminent Colleagues . . . were very famous men:

(1) Sir J. J. Thomson, O.M., President of the Royal Society . . . a man unparalleled in Science.

(2) The Hon. Sir Charles Parsons, K.C.B., the Inventor of the Turbine, which has changed the whole art of Marine Engineering . . .

(3) Sir George Beilby, F.R.S., one of the greatest of Chemists . . .

The Advisory Panel of other Distinguished Men was as famous as these Magi. There were also many Eminent Associates. . . .

You would have thought that such a Galaxy of Talent would have been revered, welcomed, and obeyed — on the contrary, it was derided, spurned, and ignored.¹

Worse still, he saw the war going badly 'for want of resolute direction'. 'This war won't end till we get rid of the jelly-fishes!' he wrote Arnold White (September 9th), among whom he included Balfour, 'the author of *Philosophic Doubt*!' He was convinced that he could yet make an important contribution to the war effort, but the Government refused to give him a post in which his talents could be used to the best advantage. He himself thought, during the latter half of 1915, that his opposition to the Dardanelles policy of the Government was the chief thing in his way. With the evacuation of the Gallipoli peninsula at the end of the year, that obstacle, he hoped, had been removed. On Christmas Day, 1915, he sent Jellicoe an extract from the *Nation* of December 24th, which expressed the desire for Fisher's return to the Admiralty. 'Does anyone pretend that the naval conduct of the war is not gravely imperilled by his absence?'

His growing confidence that he might be recalled had been increased by the reception of his speech in the House of Lords on November 16th — the first of but two speeches he ever made before

¹ *Records*, pp. 65-6. An evaluation of the work of the B.I.R., which has never been attempted, would make an interesting study for a scholar with scientific interests. The basic raw material is with the Fisher Papers in the custody of the Duke of Hamilton: (1) *Board of Invention and Research, Report of Proceedings to December 1916. Minutes of General Meetings, Central Committee and Panel, 1915-1917*; (2) three volumes of B.I.R. *Reports* covering 1915-1917.

that body. Churchill, restless with his 'well-paid inactivity' and disappointed that he had not been included in the new War Committee of five, had resigned his ministerial post. Preparatory to leaving for the front (as a major of the Oxfordshire Yeomanry — in December he was promoted to colonel and took over the command of the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers), he vindicated his Admiralty administration in the House of Commons on November 15th. He emphasized the Dardanelles, stating: 'I am not going to embark upon any reproaches this afternoon, but I must say I did not receive from the First Sea Lord either the clear guidance before the event or the firm support after which I was entitled to expect.' The Admiral's first instinct was to ignore this speech altogether. But Crease, and perhaps others, convinced him that it would be better to make a short and dignified statement. A journalist who was present describes what happened:

I went down to the Lords at four. I found the House empty, save for Lord Fisher! He was sitting in grim dim solitude on the crossbench in Lord Roberts's old seat. Not even a mouse in the painted chamber! Presently a wigged clerk stole in like a ghost, stared at the old Admiral, and vanished. Then two wigged clerks crept in, stared at him, and melted away. Then a ghostly peeress floated into the gallery and the three of us gazed at each other in dead silence for ten minutes. Presently the clerks came back and Lord Fisher stalked up to them at the table and growled: 'I want to make a statement!' He would have made it then and there to the clerks, the peeress, and myself if they had allowed him. However, they pacified the old lion and he went back to his lair till the stage was set, with the Lord Chancellor on the Woolsack, Lord Lansdowne and Lord Newton and the Duke of Devonshire on the Government Bench, and Lord Haldane and Lord Loreburn at the old seadog's elbow. He roared out his speech in a tremendous voice that Winston might have heard while he was receiving his present from the Armoured Car heroes. The peers were thunder-struck and they had scarcely the presence of mind to murmur a few nervous 'Hear, Hears' before the old warrior crumpled up his manuscript, stuffed it into the side pocket of his reefer jacket, and with a broad grin on his wrinkled face and a wicked nod of his tousled head, turned on his heel, and strode out, as who should say [*sic*] 'Be damned to you all!'

I never witnessed anything so dramatic in my life.

The effect has been tremendous. I was lunching at the Reform Club today, and the opinion there was unanimous in admiration of the speech. As for the Press generally, the revulsion of feeling is remarkable. I note particularly the change in the tone of the *Manchester Guardian*, which yesterday as usual was strongly pro-Churchill. Today it comes right round.¹

Fisher's statement ran as follows:

I ask leave of your Lordships to make a statement. Certain references were made to me in a speech delivered in the other House yesterday by Mr. Churchill. I have been sixty-one years in the service of my country, and I leave my record in the hands of my countrymen. The Prime Minister said yesterday that Mr. Churchill had said one or two things which he had better not have said, and that he had necessarily and naturally left unsaid some things which will have to be said. I am content to wait. It is unfitting to make personal explanations affecting national interests when my country is in the midst of a great war.

The beginning of the new year, 1916, found him depressed once more. He saw no likelihood of any change in the Government and was 'dead against' any agitation in Parliament and the Press designed to bring him back, as was suggested by Lambert and possibly others. Providence must be allowed 'to come along when so inclined!' (A consulting engineer of some repute, Alfred James, was dissuaded by Lambert from staging a Fisher-must-return demonstration by sandwichmen in front of Parliament early in March!) 'It is very hard,' he wrote John Leyland (January 2nd, 1916), 'when one feels at one's zenith to be locked out! Such was the fate of Moses. "His eye was not dim nor his natural force abated", but he was not allowed into the Promised Land, though it was his leadership that had brought the people of Israel to its borders.' He was bitterly resentful that, while he was out, *those are in* who have brought us three dire calamities — the Dardanelles, the Tigris, and Servia — and will be again for the fourteenth time "too late" in dealing with a big German naval surprise!' (to Lambert? January 7th, 1916).

¹ James Douglas to Pamela McKenna, November 17th, 1915 (McKenna Papers).

And to Beatty (March 5th, 1916) he attributed the 'perilous' naval situation to 'lethargy, apathy, inexperience, and ineptitude'.¹

He assumed the functions of a gadfly, his particular targets in the early months of 1916 being the dangerous shortage of battle cruisers, destroyers, mine-sweepers and small craft generally, owing to the 'terrible delays' in Admiralty shipbuilding. His many representations were without appreciable effect. He had had it by the end of March, when he retired to the Hamilton country place at Balcombe in Sussex, 'feeling like Elijah when he went that day's journey into the wilderness, "and came and sat down under a juniper tree and said, *'It is enough! Take away my life!'*"' (to C. P. Scott, March 27th, 1916). He could not be consoled by Churchill, Hankey, Lambert, and others who begged him not to lose heart — that, in Churchill's words (May 14th, 1916), 'destiny has not done with you yet'. He could not see the light on the horizon that they professed to see. 'There is really nothing for it but patience and silence', he wrote Lambert on May 18th.

The fact is that Asquith would do nothing for the old Admiral. He could not forget that he had resigned 'eight times' in 1914-1915 and had 'actually deserted his post' at a time of crisis in May 1915.² There was also some question about Fisher's physical resources.

Jutland deepened Fisher's gloom. Sir Joseph Thomson remembers

very vividly the morning after the battle of Jutland; when I got to the office he was pacing up and down the room more dejected than any man I have ever seen. He kept saying time after time, 'They've failed me, they've failed me! I have spent thirty years of my life in preparing for this day and they've failed me, they've failed me!' This was the only time I ever knew him to be doubtful about the issue of the war.³

Then came the Dardanelles Commission in the early autumn. 'Nothing will come of it except white-wash!' was the Admiral's general reaction, while he strove, through personal testimony and

¹ Colonel Edward H. House, President Wilson's personal representative to the European nations (1914-1916), attended a dinner on February 17th, 1916, given in his honour by General Ellison. The guests were Fisher, two generals, and two officials of India House. 'It was one of the most interesting dinners I have attended. Lord Fisher was at his best, he criticized the Government, Winston Churchill, the Allies, and everything and everybody in such a humorous way that it kept the table in an uproar' (Charles Seymour [ed.]: *Intimate Papers of Colonel House* [2 vols., New York, 1926], II, 190).

² J. L. Hammond: *C. P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian* (rev. ed., New York, 1934), pp. 195-6, quoting an Asquith-Scott conversation of March 8th, 1916.

³ Thomson: *Recollections and Reflections*, p. 219.

through a prepared statement for the Commission, to explain his position.

Even before the Commission had completed its labours, Fisher was deeply concerned over the growing menace of the U-boat. 'Bread tickets', he wrote Lambert on August 30th, 'are surely coming along with the steady work of the German submarines sinking persistently so much mercantile tonnage every day!' More than ever he wanted to return to some position of authority that would enable him to plot and direct the anti-submarine campaign — whether as First Sea Lord, First Lord, or in a special post. In a position of authority he also hoped to resurrect his old Baltic project — a great amphibious coup that would change the entire complexion of the war.

His hopes were raised by the imminent fall of the Asquith Government in November, but they were just as quickly dashed. On November 29th Jellicoe was appointed First Sea Lord, and Beatty to the command of the Grand Fleet. Fisher was shocked and deeply disappointed. 'Balfourian subtlety in cajoling Jellicoe from his duty to serve a political purpose has "wiped me out"! (so the Tories say!).' The Admiral was upset because he believed that Jellicoe's strength was as a fleet commander, and because he lacked faith in Beatty's abilities as a Commander-in-Chief; but also, although this is a moot point and he never spoke of it, because Jellicoe's appointment just about destroyed all chance of his becoming First Sea Lord again. Any remaining chance of becoming First Lord disappeared a week later. On December 5th Asquith resigned, and on the 7th Lloyd George formed a new Coalition Government, with Carson succeeding Balfour as First Lord (the latter replaced Grey at the Foreign Office). Nor would the new Prime Minister offer Fisher any other responsible post, despite the entreaties of political supporters like C. P. Scott and Lambert, who honestly believed that Fisher was the only one of the military and naval hierarchy who had the divine spark of genius. Fisher always believed, on the authority of Lord Ranksborough, that his exclusion was due to 'courtly and social intrigue'. The real reason lay deeper: the opposition among Lloyd George's colleagues.

And so the miserable year of 1916 ended. The remarkable thing is that the Admiral's buoyancy never deserted him. 'But I think I may yet come in!' he optimistically reported to Lambert (December 23rd). 'So I don't relax my thoughts ever for one instant as to what could be evolved when the big emergency does come!' There is one hint as to what he had in mind, if given a position of responsibility.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

To Lambert on Christmas Day: 'I have a lovely design of a wonderful craft for destroying German submarines, which I should build a thousand of, perhaps!' But his sun had set once and for all in December 1916.

240: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR (?)

July 5th, 1915

Secret and Private

This war is going to be won by many inventions. Eleven months of war have shown us simply as servile copyists of the Germans. When *they* have brought explosive shells into damnable prominence, *then* so have we! When *they* have produced grenades for trench work, *then* so have we! When *they* produced big siege mortars for Liège, Namur, and Maubeuge, so did we *then* begin big guns! Noxious gases made us send Professors to study German asphyxiation! German mines and German submarines have gone ahead of us by leaps and bounds, although some few years ago we were in a position of apparently unassailable superiority. Our airships were dropped five years ago, and our schemes for dealing with future sea war are lagging behind when drastic and relentless revolution is demanded by the mine and the submarine in both the Navy and the Mercantile Marine. Many inventions must be fostered. So Mr. Balfour says: 'Let us collect "brains" and go ahead'! Lord Rayleigh¹ and others of his kidney will select 'Brains' — not to be inventors, but to push such inventors as Porte and Wright and Hopkinson² in the new types of air and water attack and defence. Vast rearrangements are looming ahead in ship construction which it is impossible for those in office to deal with, because they are fully occupied in current work which is immense and absorbing; they have no time for new inventions.

What occur to me as the most pressing war subjects are:

(1) Development of *airships*, and bigger and simpler aeroplanes, and such inventions as Porte's.

¹ The third Baron Rayleigh, 'undisputed leader of British science on the physical side' after the death of Lord Kelvin in 1907 (*Dictionary of National Biography*).

² Acting Commander (afterwards Lieutenant-Colonel, R.A.F.) John C. Porte, in command of the Felixstowe Royal Naval Air Station, 1915-1918; Second Lieutenant Charles (afterwards Sir Charles) S. Wright, Royal Engineers, engaged in wireless signal work in the Army; Bertram Hopkinson, Professor of Mechanism and Applied Mechanics at Cambridge, 1903-1918. There is some question whether C. S. Wright was the 'Wright' Fisher was referring to.

BOARD OF INVENTION...1915-1916

(2) Anti-submarine craft and anti-submarine devices including anti-submarine mines.

(3) Bombs and grenades for all species of fighting. A visit to Palmers' Works after the dropping of the Zeppelin bombs appalled me by our backwardness. 50 TONS of glass were smashed when the 16 men were killed by one comparatively small German bomb! That German bomb dropped on the upper deck of the *Iron Duke* would have left us no Jellicoe, nor anyone else on the upper deck! What is going to prevent the improved Zeppelins, with their daily increasing radius of action, dropping bombs on our Fleet either at sea or in harbour? Wreck 10 Zeppelins, but if one of them only gets in and wrecks Jellicoe, where are we?

These few remarks are to emphasize Mr. Balfour's remarks at lunch on July 4th to push ahead by the agency of small sub-committees the urgent work of war invention, so utterly impossible for any big public department to undertake because they are legitimately absorbed in current administration and have no time for research.

Have I the mind of the First Lord of the Admiralty in these remarks? If so, I advance with immense confidence of early great results.

Fisher

P.S. *Man invents. Monkeys imitate!*

241: TO ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

July 7th, 1915

Dear Mr. Balfour,

I had a most enjoyable lunch yesterday at your house and met your brother Gerald, but I fear we rather talked of Nelson and the Nile than of many inventions! (Anyhow, I didn't get much lunch through talking.) Afterwards Lord Rayleigh gave me a list of names which I am busy with preparatory to seeing you shortly thereon.

I got a letter last night from Sir John Jellicoe, saying what is obvious to every fool: 'the absolute necessity for a strong anti-submarine policy, both in regard to new construction and the use of existing vessels. The Zeppelins we cannot tackle, unfortunately. Nothing but sister Zeppelins can do that, and alas! the obstinacy of a few has put us in a position from which we cannot recover.' Both

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

Winston and Sir A. K. Wilson ought to be shot like dogs! (This last sentence is mine! *Jellicoe forgot to put it in!*) . . .

I've had a lovely letter from McKenna and I lunch with him today. There will be no Treasury bickerings! . . .

Yours truly,

Fisher

242: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

The Athenaeum
Pall Mall, S.W.
July 12th, 1915

My sweet Pamela,

Your inventors' stories lovely! but I believe you left out a sheet, as there's no ending to your letter! *N'importe! There's no ending to our love!!!*

I am getting on 'spiffing' with Balfour!

Secret. Winston has remonstrated with A. J. B. at my getting this appointment without Winston having first been consulted!!! A. J. B. replied he didn't see what concern it was of Winston's! . . .

Dear old Birrell¹ on Saturday came and asked me if he could lunch with me, and told me *such a lot*, which I reserve for our next meeting! *which will be very soon!* Birrell likes me because he thinks I'm like Diocletian or some other Roman!

Yours to eternity,

F.

Fond love to Reggie.

243: TO ARCHIBALD S. HURD²

August 31st, 1915

My dear Hurd,

Excuse the writing paper — I am out of doors with the moor all round me, wishing I was never going to leave such an Elysium! but

¹ Augustine Birrell, Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 1907-1916.

² Afterwards Sir Archibald Hurd; leader writer and Naval Correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, 1899-1928.

BOARD OF INVENTION...1915-1916

this d—d Board of Research takes me back to London (3, Eaton Square) tomorrow, Wednesday. I won't deny there are some very big things that this Board may bring forth. McKenna firmly believes we shall devise some wonderful scheme by which on a button being pressed the whole fabric of the German Empire crumbles into dust! and then he says to me, 'You are still the idol of the nation and you will be recalled by acclamation to the hearts of the people.' (Perhaps you did not know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had this poetic strain in his nature!)

Both Balfour and Asquith have been and are most cordial, but the Dardanelles is the skeleton in the cupboard which haunts them — I am the skeleton! — so there is no communion of hearts at present. I cannot understand how the whole British Press, fully acquainted with the disastrous consequences attendant upon such a criminal adventure, has gone on backing up the butchery now in progress with absolutely no commensurate result, however successful. On the contrary, we give Constantinople to a huge Power like Russia instead of to Bulgaria.

However, no use expatiating on this further. Bonar Law has had Winston Churchill to spend the week-end with him! 'And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves.' *St. Luke*, Chap. 23, Verse 12.

Never did any man hate another as Bonar Law hated Winston, and his condition of the Coalition was that Winston should not be in the Cabinet, and a friend of yours First Lord in his place. However, Balfour stood out for Winston because of the Dardanelles. (You had better burn this.)

Your kind letter and its enclosure most acceptable. I don't want to be egotistical, but there is the stubborn fact that the 6 years from 1904 to 1910 gave us the Navy that has now swept the seas, and without undue arrogance I can say it:

'Alone I did it.'

I put my faith in the 51st chap. of Jeremiah. 'The Lord God of recompenses shall surely requite.' Though I'm afraid we've got to wait for the Day of Judgment!

Even now to-day a Big Policy would end the War! But there is no Big Mind!

Yours,

Fisher

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

244: FROM ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Admiralty, Whitehall
September 6th, 1915

Private

My dear Lord Fisher,

I entirely agree with you that a developed submarine is the coming type of fighting ship, and I believe there are many in this Office who take the same view, although great differences of opinion may exist as to the time which will elapse before this tremendous revolution is accomplished.

The point on which I am compelled to differ from you does not relate to the direction in which navies are going to develop, but as to the effects which this development will have on the fortunes of the British Empire. You seem to regard with equanimity, and even with satisfaction, the development of the submarine provided that Britain leads the way and maintains her superiority in this type of ship as she so far has succeeded in doing in the case of dreadnoughts and battle cruisers. I wish I could think so. Supposing, for the sake of argument, that by a stroke of the pen all existing ships of war were turned into submarines, so that the strength of the British Navy as compared with that of the German Navy would be on paper exactly what it is now. How would the naval strength of the two nations compare? To me it seems that our position would be one of extreme peril. It is true that we could blockade all the German ports, but it seems to be also true that Germany could blockade all our ports. For Germany this would only mean a degree of inconvenience from which she is now suffering, and it would not mean even this if she was at peace with France and Russia. But to us, blockade would mean something very near destruction; and all our superiority in the number and perhaps in the efficiency of our submarine force would do little or nothing to help us.

I await the development of your new type of submarine¹ with the greatest possible interest; but at this moment I would give up all the new submarines in the world if the Inventions Board could discover a method of destroying the old ones!!

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour

¹ Fisher had put forward a 12-inch gun submersible (a 'submarine dreadnought') on August 5th, but 'apathy and lethargy' delayed her till the war was nearly over. This 'submarine monitor' (*MI 1*), designed to fight above or below water, was 'the forerunner of the Battleship of the future' (*Records*, p. 188). Its single 12-inch gun fired, when its muzzle was above water, a 850-lb. shell.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

245: TO H. H. ASQUITH

36, Berkeley Square, W.
October 16th, 1915

Dear Prime Minister,

If you carry out the glorious project of Syria and Mesopotamia¹ — *time presses*, as the first fortnight in November is the 'witching' time.

Yours truly,

Fisher

I am ready to leave at 5 minutes notice if anyone says it can't be done.

246: TO H. H. ASQUITH

36, Berkeley Square
October 28th, 1915

My dear Prime Minister,

At this juncture and amidst such great anxieties I am trusting to be made some use of, as probably few (or I might say no one) can know as much of Navy work, and I am doing nothing at all.

Yours truly,

Fisher

247: FROM ARTHUR J. BALFOUR

Admiralty, Whitehall
November 1st, 1915

Private

My dear Lord Fisher,

I certainly would not for a moment think of standing in your way as regards any correspondence which you may think fit to conduct

¹ 'I had called on Mr. Asquith on September 9th, 1915, and suggested to him the evacuation of Gallipoli and the transfer of the force to Syria to go down the Euphrates to overcome Mesopotamia' (Fisher note on a copy of the letter). The Mesopotamian campaign had been under way since the first of the year. On November 5th, to the Prime Minister: '*I hope you are not losing any time in annexing the Euphrates and the Tigris!*'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

with the Prime Minister. I am sure he will treat any communication you may choose to make to him with the fullest consideration. Personally, I rather hoped that you would find in the Board of Invention a sphere of activity in which your originality of mind and long experience would have ample scope. Its labours have effected much for the public service, and under the efficient guidance which you can give, could do, I think, even more.¹

Yours very sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour

248: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
November 5th, 1915

Private and Confidential

My beloved Friend,

. . . You won't have Asquith — no one will! *Only God Almighty!* He is far too adroit for Carson² or anyone else to oust him! Asquith would welcome a Dardanelles inquiry — it would be a red herring! It would draw away all other criticism! It would last an interminable time and Winston would be at his best in confusing the judges! What you want is a national Government and the present gang turned out neck and crop! . . .

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

¹ Writing to Asquith on November 3rd, Fisher summarized this letter and added: 'I must say I think I could at this crisis be better employed than presiding over these learned men. However, that is for you to say!'

² Sir Edward (afterwards Baron) Carson, Attorney-General, 1915-1916, later First Lord of the Admiralty, 1916-1918.

Wallington
Cambo, Morpeth
November 17th, 1915

Dear Lord Fisher,

I read your speech in the Lords of yesterday with a sense of deep personal pride at being honoured by your friendship. It reminded me of the style in which Mr. Secretary Pitt's admirals and generals said what they had to say during the most glorious wars which England ever waged. I have heard you make a *longer* speech — notably during our walk through the *Inflexible* at Malta in November 1881, when I find the following entry in my diary: — '*Alexandra, Temeraire, and Inflexible*, — two hours' explanation from Fisher, a most marvellous performance.' But your three sentences yesterday were of greater weight and example still. I well remember how, before we had ever met, and when I used to grumble at those fine Admirals — Sir Houston Stewart, Cooper Key, and Hoskins — about your requisitions for your famous command, how they used to laugh and say: 'Wait till you know Jack Fisher.' Well! I know him now; and proud I am of it.

Forgive this short expression of friendship and life-long, unshaken confidence from

Yours most sincerely,

George Otto Trevelyan

¹ Trevelyan, second Baronet, was the distinguished historian and onetime Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty (1881-1882). This is one of a great many congratulatory letters on the Admiral's speech in the House of Lords. The Earl of Rosebery wrote (November 19th): 'Bravo, my dear Admiral, you have done the right thing in the right way, and one lonely admirer is delighted.' Hedley (afterwards Sir Hedley) le Bas, the publisher, spoke (November 17th) of the 'unanimous opinion' in Fleet Street that 'in making your statement you did the right thing in the right way. Your speech . . . has made a tremendous impression'. John Burns, onetime member of the Asquith Government, sent this poem (November 17th):

The noblest answer to them all
Is simple silence when they bawl.
(signed) John — not Robert

To Cecil Fisher the overjoyed Admiral wrote (November 17th): 'ALL the newspapers are very good to-day. . . . Winston has put off his departure [for France] fixed for to-day on account of my speech! Isn't it fun?'

7 a.m., Sunday
[1916]

... In the book I have recommended to you (*The Private Correspondence of Lord Granville*) it is related that whilst Lord Nelson was yet alive Lady Hamilton said to a friend that, could only she be Nelson's wife *for one hour only*, she would give her life and all the world beside! It's very interesting to read many other 'life touches' in that book! How wonderful if all private correspondence were published! Then the heart shines forth!

It's interesting how all classes were affected by Nelson's death. Lady Bessborough writes, '*There was a hush throughout the land*', and everyone wore an armlet with Nelson's name on it!

Nelson had an interview with the great Pitt, Prime Minister, who was said to be so arrogant, and Nelson, asked how he received him, answered, 'As a great statesman should receive a high officer'!

Rosebery said to me he believed the chief cause of Nelson's immense, unprecedented hold over the hearts of the masses even to the present day was the curious pervading feeling that he was unappreciated and ill-treated by those in High Places!...

The other day some lady said to me of Nelson: 'He was so lovable because he was so human, his frailties were so pure and yet so transparent. It was guileless guile. He made no secret of his devotion to Lady Hamilton, but there was only one Lady Hamilton in his life. In those days it was common from the King downwards to be as Solomon in numbers. He never hid his reasons for loving Lady Hamilton. She was his saviour, and in this book it describes Lady Nelson as a nagging, teasing woman, frigid, prim, and detestable! Such is life!

Remember the 3 most pious men in History —

John Wesley
Bishop Jeremy Taylor
Robertson of Brighton¹

We owe to each having a nagging and pestilent wife who drove each forth into the wilderness of the world, where they all three reaped so great riches for all ages by being desolate!

¹ Wesley, the eighteenth-century founder of Methodism; Taylor, the seventeenth-century prelate and author of enduring religious writings; Robertson, the mid-nineteenth-century Anglican clergyman who won a reputation as an earnest preacher.

BOARD OF INVENTION...1915-1916

251: TO THE DUCHESS OF HAMILTON

[1916?]

... '*Ye know not what shall be on the morrow*'! You would not have relished the splendid sermon of last Sunday on that text, as he inveighed most bitterly against indulging in what he called silly and futile imaginings about the dead and communicating with them and perfectly preposterous human reasonings about what God has grandiloquently hidden from us 'of that day and hour knoweth no man', and he gave us instance after instance of our Saviour perpetually declining to satisfy curiosity about the future or about the dead or about 'signs' of any sort! But I won't annoy you any more.¹

What I feel myself so bitterly is that I could do so much and yet I have to suffer enforced exile! I really am an outcast! And all from envy! The first murder was caused by envy. Cain envied Abel. And so 'envy' is put first in the Litany before '*hatred and malice and all uncharitableness*'! And I've often told you the biggest wound received by Caesar: 'See what a rent the *envious* Casca made'. . . .

F.

252: TO LADY FISHER

Balcombe Place
Balcombe, Sussex
[early January 1916]

Dearest Kitty,

The situation is as follows. Asquith and Balfour will not permit me to have any part whatever in the conduct of the War, and the underlings at the Admiralty, taking their cue from that, put every obstacle in the way of the Board I'm Chairman of. Hence, so long as the present Government continues, it is simply a humiliation my being in London. If there is a change of Government (which I greatly doubt, as Asquith is so adroit a parliamentarian), then I may have a chance, but who will be Prime Minister no one can guess. So it's desirable I hold aloof both from politicians and journalists of all shades of opinion, for if I give myself to one special person I damage

¹ The Duchess was an ardent spiritualist.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

myself with all the others. That is the second reason for being away from London. At present journalists of all shades seem equally wishful to advance my cause. I don't want, therefore, to see one more than another, therefore the best way is to see none. That's the third reason for being away from London.

In haste. Love to all.

Y. l. h.

J. F.

253: TO DAVID LLOYD GEORGE¹

Balcombe Place
[early January 1916]

Dear Mr. Lloyd George,

To this place $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours by motor car and a lovely drive through *Red Hill* . . . My host and hostess, the Duke and Duchess of Hamilton, will be delighted to give you lunch. I think what I have to say to you would interest you and be of public benefit, and the wilds of the country are more suitable for our conversation than my being closeted with you in London and proclaimed in every newspaper.

War is Big Conceptions and Quick Decisions. Think in oceans and shoot at sight! There is no imagination in our conduct of the War. We only do the 'Sergeant Major' part of it! Your speech will be the history of the War! '*Toujours trop tard!*'² A drastic revolution is imperative. On October 20 last I said the only solution was a General Election with the election cry of '*The War! The War! Nothing but the War!*'

When I went to the Admiralty last time, on October 30, 1914, I found after nearly three months of war that the only 'push' made for a big war was the acceleration of one submarine!!! Thanks to your financial acumen I laid down 593 vessels of sorts *and had a plan* for July 1915, for which those vessels were built. That plan was blasted

¹ Lloyd George was Minister of Munitions (-June 1916), then Secretary of State for War (-December 1916), in the Asquith Coalition Government.

² Lloyd George had said, towards the end of a speech of December 20th, 1915, in the House of Commons: ' . . . too late? Ah! two fatal words of this War! Too late in moving here. Too late in arriving there. Too late in coming to this decision. Too late in starting with enterprises. Too late in preparing. In this War the footsteps of the Allied forces have been dogged by the mocking spectre of "Too Late"; and unless we quicken our movements damnation will fall on the sacred cause for which so much gallant blood has flowed. I beg employers and workmen not to have "Too Late" inscribed upon the portals of their workshops: that is my appeal.' Fisher often referred to this 'famous speech'.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

by the Dardanelles, *and so was I!* We want another plan. None exists! I'm not sure even of our coming sea supremacy! So I want to see you.

Yours,

F.

254: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Balcombe Place
January 3rd, 1916

My dear Arnold White,

I hope you got my telegram of thanks for your kind words to me. It is really very sad, when one feels quite at one's maximum, to be locked out as I am! And truly, without being egotistical, I have made no mistake since 1902, when I introduced the new officer and the new sailor, also the new Navy, and scrapped fossils, both in ships and men and officers — hence our incomparable personnel of to-day, and every vessel mine up to the *Queen Elizabeth* (which is not a success, as she draws too much water, is too slow, and they have reverted in her to a museum of guns!).

The new battle cruisers I laid down (on coming to the Admiralty recently) my successors have delayed. A day of reckoning is coming! It may be that Jephthah will return!

And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, '*Did not ye hate me, and drive me out? Why are ye come to me when ye are in distress?*' And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, 'Therefore are we turned again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight, and thou shalt be our head!'¹

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

¹ *Judges xi*, 7-8, somewhat condensed.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

255: TO ADMIRAL (RET.) JOHN MORESBY¹

Balcombe Place
January 7th, 1916

Private

My beloved Friend,

I got your estimable letter last night late, forwarded to me here, where I have escaped to be free from interviewers high and low, and I do no good by remaining in London, as I am made no use of, nor am I concerned in the political crisis, as I am not associated with any political section.

'Sworn to no party
Of no sect am I!
I can't be silent
And I will not lie!'

All your kind efforts are useless. Pray don't trouble further. *We can't hustle Providence!* Rebecca tried to with Jacob and made a mess of it! He would have supplanted Esau all right if she had only let it alone! But she would anticipate Providence!

Yours for ever,

Fisher

256: TO ANDREW BONAR LAW²

January 7th, 1916

Private and Secret

Dear Mr. Bonar Law,

I much regret not meeting you at lunch, but I was unavoidably compelled to leave London at short notice, but I hope there may be another opportunity.

Balfour ruined his party: I hope he won't ruin his Country!

I think there may be a very big German naval surprise forthcoming.

¹ Fisher noted on a letter from Moresby of 1911: 'From Admiral John Moresby, age 82, whose life I made a burden when I was a young Flag Captain!' And in *Memories* (p. 284): 'This Admiral annexed [1884] a Continent, abounding in riches in New Guinea; but he got no thanks; and England gave away his gift [to Germany]. But his name lives there [Port Moresby].' Fisher was often comforted by Moresby's letters.

² Bonar Law was Secretary of State for the Colonies in the Asquith Coalition Government, 1915-1916.

ing one of these near days!¹ Please remember that a Naval 'Colenso'² is *irretrievable, irreparable, final!*

I can't say more than this in a letter. I've used every human exertion for the successful conduct of the war in the seven short months of this war that I was permitted to remain at the Admiralty.

Since June 10th, 1902 (when I became Second Sea Lord), I have remorselessly revolutionized every fighting item of the Fleet, both in personnel and in material. *To-day every officer and every man and every vessel in the Grand Fleet is the outcome of that Big Revolution of 1902 to 1910.* Fossils were recklessly scrapped by multitudes, both officers and ships — 162 of the latter which could not fight or run away, hence our present young officers and our present incomparable ships; but they can't fight against long odds as Cradock against von Spee! Afterwards we did not beat von Spee, we just *annihilated* him! A whole Fleet sent to the bottom and yet not one man killed or wounded in the British dreadnought battle cruiser that did the job! That's war!

Balfour spontaneously told me at an early War Council that everything I had ever predicted about Naval War and this war in particular had come absolutely true.

- I. The Dardanelles.
- II. The Dreadnought Battle Cruiser.
- III. The Submarine.

War is '*Audacity*' and '*Imagination*'! There is neither now!

When I arrived at the Admiralty as First Sea Lord in this War on October 30th, 1914, I found that all that had been done in face of a huge war was to accelerate one submarine and that there were fewer submarines than when I had left the Admiralty four years previously, and that my programme of big airships that would have out-Zeppelined Zeppelin had been completely dropped! I *at once* laid down 593 vessels, all part of a big plan to be carried out in July 1915. That plan was blasted by the Dardanelles! (*So was I and I remain blasted!*) The man who was always right has been kicked out — the man who has been always wrong remains in! He [Kitchener]

¹ 'Considering the immense number of skilled workmen available in the big German shipyards, it is quite likely we may have a big naval surprise! Our shipyards are empty . . . and our new biggest, fastest, greatest gun battle cruiser has been deliberately destroyed beyond hope of use . . .' (Fisher to Geoffrey Dawson, Editor of *The Times* [1912-1919, 1923-1941], January 7th, 1916).

² Colenso, a village in Natal, Union of South Africa, was the scene of the totally unexpected reverse suffered by General Buller, who was advancing to relieve Ladysmith (December 1899).

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got the Order of the Garter. I got the Order of the Boot! *Such is life!* But I am content to wait! The destruction of von Spee's Squadron meant more than anyone has appreciated, and it was effected in opposition to everyone! I never got one word of thanks or recognition for it — I alone did it. Even Jellicoe objected.

For eight months, in the very plenitude of my strength and power, I have been put in charge of a Chemist's Shop, and Balfour says to me in extenuation, when I offered to humiliate myself by joining the Board as Third Sea Lord, so as to get a submarine battleship built in 6 months that would end the War — he said, 'If once you put your foot inside the Admiralty, where should we all be?' and when I told the Prime Minister this story, he said, 'Yes. That's the mischief of it.'

Yours,

Fisher

257: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Board of Invention and Research
Victory House, Cockspur Street, S.W.
January 14th, 1916

My dear Friend,

. . . Bonar Law very anxious to see me, also the Editor of *The Times* asked to see me urgently yesterday, and he remained two hours. He says the whole country is seething to have me back! But so long as 'Wait and See' [Asquith] and the '*Philosophic Doubter*' [Balfour] are where they are, *I am out of it!*

Yours,

F.

258: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
January 18th, 1916

PRIVATE

My dear Lord Fisher,

. . . I am sorry to say that the *Furious* is not the only vessel hopelessly delayed. There is not a single ship that was laid down during your tenure of office that has not been delayed in completion by

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

months, as far as I can see. Destroyers that should have been delivered in October have not yet arrived. Submarines due between June and November have not turned up yet. I should put the average delay at 3-9 months for all classes of ships. I don't know whether real efforts are being made to get the ships completed. All I know is that for several months I have not been allowed to send ships to Home yards to refit, on the plea that I am delaying new construction by doing so.

Rosyth basin and docks will not be available till April, I believe, because the Board would not give up the idea of using the Lock as a dock where a bad leak was found. We all begged the Board to do this, and if they had agreed, ships would have been in dock there last November. I confess to feeling weary of protests.

My mine-sweeping force is now 8 sloops only (after all these months), and mines being sown round fleet bases.

This is all for your private eye, but it is very disheartening at times.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

259: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
January 20th, 1916

My dear Lord Fisher,

Your letter just received. I should most distinctly refuse to be mixed up with any committee on the conduct of the war, for the reasons you give. My last letter, which crossed yours, shows pretty plainly that the situation is bad, and if you are drawn in, you will share the responsibility. I write letter after letter on the blockade questions, but the F.O. seems quite imbecile. They are afraid of their own shadows and imagine every neutral is anxious to go to war with us and can do us harm. I don't believe it and never shall till I see the declaration of war. I sent Lord Robert Cecil¹ direct an urgent letter on the subject two days ago. My suggestion most certainly to you is to keep clear of it. . . .

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

¹ Afterwards first Viscount Cecil of Chelwood; Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1915-1916.

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260: FROM H. H. ASQUITH

10, Downing Street
January 22nd, 1916

Confidential

My dear Lord Fisher,

My attention has been called to a number of articles in the daily press suggesting that Germany has a surprise in store for us in the shape of 17-inch guns to be mounted in her battleships.¹ As you have always been a pioneer in increasing the size of artillery mounted afloat, I should very much like to have your views both as to the feasibility and probability of such a naval development in Germany. I should be much obliged, therefore, if you would be good enough to let me have a memorandum on the subject.

Yours sincerely,

H. H. Asquith

261: TO H. H. ASQUITH

36, Berkeley Square
January 24th, 1916

My dear Prime Minister,

Since I left the Admiralty eight months ago, I have no knowledge whatever as to information received by the Admiralty respecting work in hand by the Germans as to any such surprise in store for us such as you suggest in your letter to me of the day before yesterday, so on consideration I do not see how I can give you any such authoritative opinion as you desire; nor, I suppose, would you go outside the Admiralty for any such expression of opinion, save in order to fortify yourself on so grave a matter by another opinion than of those open to blame, if any inexcusable omission on our part should become evident. Therefore, may I suggest to you to see Sir John Jellicoe, as of course he has all Admiralty information, which I have not.

To my mind an equal cause of disquietude lies in the matter of the German destroyers, where his opinion would be final also. But I have had no communication with him on this subject.

Yours, truly,

Fisher

¹ Germany never mounted anything larger than a 15-inch gun in her capital ships.

P.S. I think I should add that, to provide against any such possible eventuality as the Germans mounting a bigger naval gun than ours, I started a year ago an 18-inch gun battle cruiser — the *Furious* — of 33 knots' speed and only 21 feet draught of water. But as this vessel has been so delayed as not likely to be ready during this war — whereas I meant to use her this spring — and only 1,000 men are now working on her, while another ship (the *Courageous*) alongside her, with only 15-inch guns, has 4,000 men working on her (she was commenced only a few weeks earlier than the *Furious*), it would appear as if the Admiralty had received information that negated the idea of the Germans having a 17-inch naval gun.

I had been arranging for more 18-inch guns being built before I left the Admiralty, but the matter was suspended on my leaving. I afterwards pressed Mr. Balfour to proceed with them, and he kindly saw the head of the firm making the 18-inch guns on the subject, but no further orders have been given.

262: TO H. H. ASQUITH

36, Berkeley Square
January 25th, 1916

My dear Prime Minister,

The matter is extremely technical but overwhelmingly important to the Grand Fleet — if the Germans have, as feasible, devoted their undepleted shipyards and their husbanded building resources in acquiring a big destroyer superiority over the number and quality of those possible to be with the Grand Fleet, then the issue of a fight between the two Fleets, till now assured to us, might be seriously imperilled. That is why I briefly said the destroyer question gave me equal disquietude with the big gun, *and so I wish you to see Jellicoe!*

Undoubtedly we have lagged (*and are now lagging*) behind most seriously in not pushing destroyers and other types.¹

Yours truly,

Fisher

¹ A printed version of this letter adds: 'with new fighting qualities'. Fisher afterwards noted on a copy of this letter (date?): 'Since this was written, the German destroyers have fired at us with a 5.9-inch gun — our new destroyers (about to be built) are only to have 4-inch guns.'

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263: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
January 29th, 1916

PRIVATE

My dear Lord Fisher,

I have as yet heard nothing about the 'ray of light' invention, nor from the Prime Minister. If the Germans have really added much to their TBD's, as I fully expect is the case, we are certainly likely to be in a bad way.

The delays are terrible. In August last it was anticipated that I should have received by *now* an addition of 17 new boats [destroyers]. I have actually got 2, and the *rate* of delay is a progressive one.

The case is almost worse in light cruisers, and is equally bad as regards submarines. Of course, battleships are also delayed, as also the 'Furious' class, but my most pressing need is and *always has been* destroyers and *minesweepers*. The latter don't come at all.

I don't want to go behind the back of the Board, or I would write to the Prime Minister. I write privately as well as officially to the Admiralty. I don't see what more I can do. I sometimes think of writing to Mr. McKenna, but it would be again going behind the Board. The 'RUSH' chit is badly wanted again.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

264: TO ANDREW BONAR LAW

36, Berkeley Square
[early February 1916]

Private and secret

Dear Mr. Bonar Law,

Instead of Mr. Asquith having Sir John Jellicoe before the War Council for the reasons given in my two letters to him, he has referred those letters to the Board of Admiralty. This is rather funny! It's the Board of Admiralty who are jeopardizing the Country. Why did Mr. Asquith ever write to me if he was satisfied with the Board of Admiralty? Now I am pushed in to do someone else's dirty work! That Zeppelin that was wrecked the day before yesterday in the North Sea ought to have been instantly searched for by clouds of

destroyers and cruisers! *Was it?* (*In fact, destroyers should have been there.*) Or did I have to send Sir Percy Scott at noon yesterday to 10, Downing Street to force action on the Admiralty? Asquith wrote to Balfour — *there never was such apathy!!!* If we could get that Zeppelin, we should have the whole secret of their construction, which has so baffled our experts. It's worth '*beyond all price*' to get it! I enclose an interesting extract of over a year ago!¹ '*No action was taken.*' Is any action ever taken till TOO LATE!

I propose at an early date to take a drastic step to make the Country acquainted with my views. I think I have a case that will necessitate a change.

Yours truly,

Fisher

...

265: TO C. P. SCOTT²

36, Berkeley Square
February 2nd, 1916

Private

Dear Mr. Scott,

So many thanks for your news of Mr. Bonar Law, which was *precisely* his attitude when I was unjustly got rid of on May 22 last! *He then wrote me most cordial letters, BUT HE DID NOT LIFT HIS LITTLE FINGER!*

I've heard from Sir John Jellicoe and have arranged to see him on his arrival. *I think he is going to fight!* The agitation against Mr. Balfour seems to be spreading. I hear 100 Unionist M.P.'s are leagued now against him.

Please receive my sincere appreciation of your kindly attention to all I had to say! I can only repeat to you that it would be utter folly to suppose that the Germans had been doing nothing in the way of preparing some big naval surprise with the great shipbuilding and gun-making resources they have at their disposal, *so we ought to have continued at high pressure the big programme I initiated and added to it as time went on.* The new type of Zeppelin, from its greater radius of

¹ Enclosed was the extract from the War Council meeting of January 7th, 1915, which is referred to above, p. 124, n.

² Scott, Editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, 1872-1929, whose leading aim in 1916 was to get Fisher reinstated as First Sea Lord. He considered his gifts indispensable.

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action (600 miles) and its increased height of 15,000 feet, makes the Zeppelins a serious danger to the Grand Fleet.

I hope you will come and see me again when next you come to London.

Yours,

Fisher

A BIG SMASH IS IMMINENT! A FATAL SMASH! The cry should be, not 'Get Fisher in'! but *GET BALFOUR OUT!*

266: TO H. H. ASQUITH

February 3rd, 1916

My dear Prime Minister,

In your letter to me of this date you kindly refer to my having been the pioneer in increasing the size of artillery mounted afloat, which this present war has proved up to the very hilt to be right, especially in the example of sinking von Spee after his murder of Admiral Cradock, and again in the near annihilation of the German battle cruisers, which would have been effected completely but for the supineness of Admiral Moore, Admiral Beatty's Second-in-Command, and Captain Pelly, the Captain of the *Tiger*, on January 24 of last year. The despairing signal of the *Seydlitz* will ever remain a great memento of the triumph of the big gun. You wish to have my views both as to the feasibility and probability of such a naval development in Germany as 17-inch guns being mounted in her battleships.

When, thanks to your support and against high opposition, I returned to the Admiralty, on October 30, 1914, as First Sea Lord, my first duty was to initiate a building programme adequate to the requirements of a big war, for all that had been done up to that date was to accelerate one submarine! In all some 593 vessels of sorts were laid down, and the chief of these was a type your question to me is concerned with, and the reasons that led me to recommend it will answer your question. They apply with still more force at the present moment than then:

The German Admiralty, I felt convinced, would be amazed at our battle cruiser, the *Invincible*, being chiefly responsible for the sinking

of von Spee's Squadron and loss of 3,000 German sailors without a single man being killed or wounded on board the *Invincible*. Such a fact brings home the big-gun principle when associated with high speed as in the battle cruiser type. It was therefore perfectly certain the German Navy would immediately initiate a big-gun policy, so, accordingly, without any of the usual preliminaries, which time did not permit of, we ordered 18-inch guns with such secrecy that the Germans only ordered 17-inch guns — that is to say, the times coincide in the relative progress of the two types of guns. It is assumed that the expert opinion is correct that the recovered German projectiles fired at Dunkirk were of that calibre.

No reliance can be placed in such a matter on spies, but it may be reasonably surmised that the proof rounds of the first of a new type of guns would not in war be wasted at the proof butts but fired at the enemy — this would explain the few rounds fired at Dunkirk.

The next question is: Is it feasible and probable that such guns could be mounted in German ships? The reply is in the affirmative because the necessary reconstruction of the hull, etc., is feasible, and the delay in the completion of the German ships, through no lack of skilled workmen, points to some big alteration, and the only alteration that would benefit these new German ships would be a bigger gun.

I was distressed to find on paying a private visit to the shipyards that the battle cruiser *Furious* with her 18-inch guns had been so delayed by Admiralty orders as not likely to be ready in this war, and from a letter received yesterday from Sir John Jellicoe I gather that the other new British battle cruisers have also been disastrously delayed, not to mention other types of important vessels. I urged on Mr. Balfour the vital importance of ordering more 18-inch guns, and he commissioned me to see the Chancellor of the Exchequer to express my sense of the urgency of the matter, and the latter fully agreed with me. Further, I asked Mr. Balfour to accord an interview to the Head of the firm making the 18-inch guns, who told me he impressed on Mr. Balfour the German menace in the shape of 17-inch guns to be mounted in German battleships. However, in my opinion the time has gone by for the 18-inch gun, and I have applied myself to a 20-inch gun and have a model of a battle cruiser that should immediately be proceeded with, to mount 6 such guns on a light draught of water; and a new type of monitor equally capable of carrying the 20-inch gun should be proceeded with, if we are to maintain our unchallengeable sea supremacy. The Admiralty postponement of the *Furious* with her 18-inch guns as well as that of

every vessel laid down during my tenure of office is worse than a mistake — it's a crime. Destroyers that should have been delivered in October last have not yet arrived with Sir John Jellicoe. Submarines due between last June and November have not turned up yet. The average delay for all classes of vessels is from three to nine months, and the mine-sweeping force with Sir John Jellicoe is now 8 sloops only after all these months! while German mines are being sown in profusion round our Fleet bases. There is absolutely no forgiveness possible for the above delays. There is no valid excuse. The mere fact of having been able to produce within 6 months submarines that crossed from America to the Dardanelles without convoy and there performed prodigies illustrates what is possible, and be it remembered the quickest time on record in this or any other country was 14 months for this feat. Again, the monitors were a miracle in rapidity. Alas! their secret, so well maintained, was permitted by the Censor to be given to the Germans,¹ and in this type they may be preparing for us such a big surprise with big guns as the mass of skilled workmen retained intact in the German shipbuilding yards renders possible and probable. While our shipyards have been denuded of men as the building slips are unoccupied, which even if not occupied for the Navy should be incessantly busy with vessels for the mercantile marine, but through crass stupidity and gross lethargy these 'delays in building are immense — the Admiralty put it down to the munitions people who take their men, they must be desperately weak to allow it.' Those are not my words: they may not be true, but they come to me from a higher authority than my own.

To summarize:

I. What have those great German shipyards with their workmen untouched been so busy about! They certainly have not been building German merchant ships! There are thousands lying idle in German ports and elsewhere, thanks to Sir John Jellicoe.

II. A French official German communiqué stated that 'Nieuport was very violently bombarded with 17-inch guns.' Manifestly the French officers could not be such idiots as not to be able with accuracy to measure the diameter of a projectile!

¹ Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett (the war correspondent who represented the London press throughout the Dardanelles campaign): 'Torpedo-Proof Monitors', *The Times*, October 20th, 1915, dealing with the arrival in the Straits in July of a new fleet of 'torpedo-proof monitors'. These craft were stated to carry the guns of battleships without the vulnerability of battleships to submarine attack. The armament and other specifications were given, including the fact that the monitors were fitted with underwater bulges as protection against torpedoes. 'This is the secret and the mystery of these craft.'

III. It was stated by accredited newspaper correspondents that fragments of shell of this calibre were picked up in Dunkirk after that town had been shelled by a naval gun mounted by the Germans over 20 miles away. This was passed by the Censor.

IV. We know when war broke out that four battleships were under construction by the Germans that admit of carrying 17-inch guns, and other big German ships and monitors improved on our plans (*as given away by the Censor in Mr. Ashmead-Bartlett's full descriptive letter from the Dardanelles*) are also capable of being so fitted. Indeed, a German paper quoted kindly to me by a friend, the *Vossische Zeitung*, states in a letter from the German High Sea Fleet from a correspondent that one of these ships has joined the Fleet, and he adds, 'Our newest armoured ship has been assigned to one of the Squadrons as Flagship', and speaks of her enormous dimensions.

In this connection I enclose a cutting recently sent me by a friend! *Marked (A).*¹

V. Even the Naval 'bow-and-arrow' party now admit that the big gun and high speed decide the sea fight, and the twaddle talked about the weather being misty and preventing advantage of superior range of fire is as ludicrous as was the opposition by the ancient Boards of Admiralty to the introduction of steam, the use of iron for shipbuilding instead of wood (the Board Minute gravely stated that wood floats and iron sinks!). No. Admiral von Pohl will come out when the weather is fine and clear. Sir David Beatty sighted the German battle cruisers at 14 miles distance; at 10 miles he hit the German *Blücher* and practically killed her then! But with bigger guns than Beatty's 13½-inch guns the battle will be concluded at far greater distances.

Von Spee's 11-inch guns might just as well have been pea-shooters. The *Invincible* was beyond his range and was his superior in speed, so did just what she liked — so will von Pohl. War is audacity and imagination, big conceptions and quick decisions. Hit first, hit hard, keep on hitting — that is the motto of the battle cruiser. No other type counts in the line of battle. Alas! The *Furious* has been

¹ An English press cutting quoting the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung*: '... we are in possession of a magic lever that is powerful enough to secure us the mastery [of the seas]. The nature of this magic key, however, it is not now the time to disclose.' 'This writer', commented the English newspaper, 'would be probably aware, in view of his vicinity to Krupp's Works, of the manufacture in large numbers at Essen of the great new Naval German Gun of 17-inch calibre, the first of which apparently was tested not long since in firing its proof rounds against Dunkirk, where the projectiles fired from a distance of over 20 miles were recovered and measured by the British experts. The largest British Naval Gun afloat is only of 15-inch calibre.'

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hopelessly delayed, with her magnificent 18-inch guns and 33 knots speed and only 21 feet draught of water, as compared with nearly 40 feet in the *Queen Elizabeth* and her 24 knots and only 15-inch guns.

As I ventured to tell you in the House of Commons recently, when you spoke to me of the naval situation, what is wanted is '*Push and Go*'! as '*the situation is bad*', so writes me a highly placed friend with his flag flying.

Yours truly,

Fisher

Postscript. I found in my six months' war time at the Admiralty as First Sea Lord that our spy information was quite unreliable and no submarine or destroyer left our shores without the Germans knowing it. I believe even now this country is reeking with German spies. So no official statement will convince me that the German Admiralty have been supinely doing nothing when their shipyards have been so busy. We can take no risks. Surprise is the first element in successful war. A naval '*Colenso*' is irretrievable, irreparable, final! You can't send round the corner and buy battle cruisers and their officers and men like a pound of sugar! You can improvise an army, you cannot improvise a fleet.

I think the very probable great preponderance of German destroyers may be even a bigger danger than the 17-inch gun. I can assert that, had I remained at the Admiralty, the 5 big battle cruisers I initiated would have been incessantly pushed and completed at an early date, and destroyers similarly would have been increasingly hastened, and no shipbuilding workman would have been allowed to leave for other work. At this moment the *Furious* with her 18-inch guns has only one thousand men employed on her, while a 15-inch gun ship alongside her has 4,000 men on her! It would be ludicrous were it not criminal! But ask Sir John Jellicoe his opinion!

There is grave anxiety and serious misgiving in the Fleet both as to the conduct of the war at sea as well as in the provision for the same. Let Sir John Jellicoe be asked to speak his mind on both points.

February 7th, 1916

My dear Jellicoe,

I have just heard that notwithstanding all opposition you are to arrive at 9.30 a.m. next Friday [February 11th] and meet the War Council at 11.30. May you have strength and power to overcome all the wiles of the politicians is my fervent prayer!

That the Admiralty have signally failed in furnishing you with destroyers, mine-sweepers, and small craft generally, is absolutely indisputable. No doubt you will bring your figures to substantiate this as well as the hopeless delay in the 18-inch gun battle cruiser *Furious* and her sister ships of my programme, of which every vessel has been unwarrantably delayed. No doubt you'll put this case strongly also.

Don't, pray, allow yourself to be drawn into any suppositious argument as to whether the Germans have or have not a 17-inch gun. *That is not the point* — the point is that *we must run no risks* and must have faster vessels and bigger guns so as to guard against any surprise! There is also no excuse for the Admiralty permitting skilled workmen from the shipyards being taken away for munitions, or for the Admiralty giving up their command of steel and other shipbuilding material as they have done. The Admiralty administration is effete and so is the direction of the sea war — and a change is imperatively demanded.

The politicians are wily enough (*if you are not careful*) to use you to strengthen themselves unless you are very definite!

I don't think it will do for me to come and meet you, but I will be all day at home at 36 Berkeley Square, should you wish to see me. . . .

Yours,

Fisher

[To understand what follows, see No. 269.]

I have written a second letter this morning to Sir John Jellicoe pointing out the very serious indeed handicapping of the Grand Fleet by the latest type of Zeppelin, which has a radius of 600 miles and can attain a height of 15,000 feet. It takes the best aeroplane one hour to climb this height, and when it gets up it has to fly at an angle, owing to the rarefied atmosphere, so loses much of its speed. Well, these Zeppelins, thus unapproachable and unattackable, can watch

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every movement of the Grand Fleet and report by wireless to the German High Sea Fleet.

P.S. Had my programme of airships laid down in January 1910 been carried out, we should have out-Zeppelin'd Zeppelin!]

268: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 8th, 1916

Private

My dear Jellicoe,

... I consulted Hankey (who McKenna tells me is *now* the one man Asquith relies on). Indeed, *yesterday* Hankey came to see me, as he thinks the state of lethargy at the Admiralty so serious, and he entreated me to write to you in the sense of this letter. He offered to meet you at 9.30 on your arrival, but I thought this might embarrass you, so I put him off.

The other day, when the Zeppelin was wrecked in the North Sea, the Admiralty apparently had no vessels patrolling (*as there should have been*) and made no attempt at all to recover the PRICELESS wreck of the Zeppelin for us to get the secrets of their construction, until I sent Percy Scott to the Prime Minister, who wrote to Balfour himself at once, but it was too late of course, although they *then* did send out.

I look upon the present Admiralty administration of the War as fraught with vital danger and I am purposing to say so in the House of Lords shortly, should your representations prove of no avail next Friday.

Yours,

Fisher

The Government are now only alarmed about London. They do not realize how very seriously indeed the new Zeppelins (capable of ascending to 15,000 feet) hamper the operations of the Grand Fleet by their large radius of scouting action, against which we have nothing, owing to the airship programme having been cancelled after I left the Admiralty in January 1910, presumably by Sir A. K. Wilson, and afterwards vetoed by Winston Churchill, who went mad on aeroplanes. Now we are spending two millions *when too late*.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

269: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square
February 8th, 1916
9 p.m.

My dear Jellicoe,

Just got your letter of yesterday telling me to write to Inverness. I fear you won't have got my letter of yesterday before you sailed. As it's important, I send you a duplicate and in pencil I've added (in the 3rd person) the gist of another letter to you, as I took no copy of it.

To-day I've heard on excellent authority that there's an intrigue to get you to serve Mr. Balfour as First Sea Lord, and my two informants tell me this will wreck you, as without doubt Balfour will soon be cleared out and he will not agree to what you would probably wish done, and when he falls he will drag you down with him! As I have already told you, they don't want me *if they can help it*, and your going as First Sea Lord would prop them up a bit!

If I should become First Lord, which don't seem likely to me (though others think so), I would certainly ask you to be First Sea Lord and Madden to succeed you, and I have a plan for substituting someone for Beatty, so that if Madden's made acting admiral he would be all right as regards seniority. . . .

Always yours,

Fisher

270: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

February 11th, 1916

Private

My dear Lambert,

Without doubt it would bring things to a head, the course you mention, but Asquith and Balfour (now that all Cabinet differences are settled) are so firmly fixed that I don't think any such action would have any effect whatever. Accordingly, Balfour is irremovable, and consequently I shall be kept out — that's the end of it! This newspaper agitation has simply degenerated into an argument as to how old I am! The real point being, Is the sea war now being conducted properly, and are we not threatened with a possible naval disaster

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

owing to ineptitude in delaying construction of new types of vessels? The cry should NOT be 'Get Fisher in!' but 'Get Balfour out!' I know for a fact that certain Cabinet Ministers are convinced that Balfour should be got rid of, but they are afraid to join together to get it done. It will be too late when the naval disaster takes place to get rid of Balfour. A naval disaster is irretrievable, irreparable, final!

Yours,

F.

271: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

36, Berkeley Square
February 11th, 1916

Secret

My beloved Jellicoe,

Your blessed wife and Lady Madden between them have kept me *au courant* with your movements, and I gather you are now likely to come down the middle of next week. It can't be helped, but it would have been best for you to have been at the opening of the discussion *on the naval situation*, which I believe is to take place to-day at the War Council in spite of your absence. Balfour will score by this, as he can put the case for Admiralty lethargy and apathy without your being there to refute him — Jackson now always being dumb and nerves all gone, so those tell me who attend the War Council — in fact he's supposed to be going, and the King is urging Hedworth Lambton as First Sea Lord in his place. I believe he has suggested five other names, but yours is not one of them, nor mine either! Stamfordham yesterday told a friend of mine that Beresford had explained to him for the King's benefit how great friends you and I were! *This seems to me to have been a work of supererogation!* Don't you think so?

I consider one of the criminal follies of Balfour's administration of the Admiralty is the sending of journalists and others to view the Grand Fleet under your command, and to be taken down as they were the other day to Harwich to see the destroyers and submarines, etc., etc. Especially there's a [Neutral], who, it is quite certain, will convey all information to the Germans — he need not write. He will return to Germany unmolested next week!

When I unofficially mentioned this criminal folly, the Admiralty answer is they are pressed by the Foreign Office. YES! ANY *Department*

now presses the Admiralty! Lloyd George has pressed all the skilled workmen out of the shipyards for his munitions, and has taken away from the Admiralty their control over steel and all shipbuilding material! And the Board of Trade press the Admiralty similarly in regard to the blockade, *and the Foreign Office press worst of all!* 3 ships with diesel oil for submarines consigned to a German firm in Sweden have, within the last few weeks, been released because of Foreign Office pressure! IT'S OUTRAGEOUS!!!

Nevertheless, Balfour and Asquith are so firmly knitted together by community of interests, that I see little hope, at present, of any change, but I do see a coming big naval disaster rapidly approaching, owing to the utter supineness in the direction of the sea war by the Admiralty, and the Admiralty compliance with every gimcrack expedition got up to appease Russia and France, squandering our naval strength, and most seriously jeopardizing our food supply by the mass of mercantile tonnage which all these expeditions necessitate. At Salonika an immense mass of shipping is now held up, and so it is with all the other pettifogging expeditions which we never should have touched, but concentrated ourselves in the decisive theatre, which is the North Sea and the Baltic, and my plan for July 1915 *would have ended the War!* But my plan was blasted and I remain blasted!

The funny thing is that Balfour and the Prime Minister (*and others influential*) all kindly say I am the one and only person who has been absolutely right both before the War and since the War in everything I have said, written, or done, and *yet I am out of it and keeping a chemist's shop!*

The best man in the War Office told me my plans for the attack on Schleswig-Holstein and destruction of Kiel Canal and the landing on the Pomeranian Coast were both of them absolutely sound and feasible, and *sure of success*, and all that mass of vessels I laid down were to carry out those two plans simultaneously. Either might have been a feint, both might have been a reality!

Balfour (so McKenna tells me) gives no attention at all to the Navy, he only thinks of the Army and Salonika and the Tigris, he being responsible for those disastrous expeditions just as he was more responsible than Winston Churchill for the Dardanelles. The result is the Admiralty is run by a parcel of old women, with the terrible danger of A. K. Wilson at any time landing us in some awful catastrophe!

I have been urged earnestly to expose the situation in the House of

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

Lords, but I am going to await the effect of your visit. I have no doubt you are well prepared for the wiles of the politicians, and if they can 'rope you in' as being satisfied, or can get you as First Sea Lord with the certainty that Balfour, with his dialectical powers, will be able to circumvent you, then without doubt Asquith will have again succeeded in effecting a great coup!

There comes a time when one has to take Big Decisions. For myself, I was offered a seat in the Cabinet to remain on, but I said to myself: 'As the price of this is that Winston Churchill is to remain in the Admiralty, I must go, as he is ruining the Navy and thereby ruining the Country', and I believe it's the best thing I ever did in my life, *though, without doubt, I wrecked myself irretrievably, as they will never have me back!* All the politicians say so! And Balfour said to me himself: 'If *ONCE you again put your foot inside the Admiralty, where should we all be?*'!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

272: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

36, Berkeley Square
February 12th, 1916

My dear Jellicoe,

The righteous public anxiety as to the looseness of the blockade, the terrible delays in Admiralty shipbuilding, the taking away by Lloyd George of skilled workmen from our shipyards and his getting control of Admiralty shipbuilding materials, and, finally, the effete administration and conduct of the War by the Admiralty, so beautifully expressed yesterday by an Admiralty messenger to Sir Philip Watts: '*Lor, Sir! We are quieter here now, Sir, than we was in peace!*' And, finally, the very grave public anxiety as to whether the hitherto assured supremacy of the British Grand Fleet may not have been jeopardized by 18 months' unstinted German efforts to effect a great German naval surprise, as most excellently set forth in the *Daily Telegraph* of February 11 (a copy of which I enclose) and so well summed up in these words:

The British Admiralty must be continually considering not what it is probable the Germans may do but what it is *POSSIBLE* they may do and taking measures accordingly.

BOARD OF INVENTION . . . 1915-1916

The nation must rely on a strong and capable Board of Admiralty exhibiting insight, courage and determination in building new ships to reinforce the Grand Fleet.

The nation must have the assurance that nothing humanly possible is being omitted to make our sea command assured. Only sailors can give that assurance — sailors who understand what war means and who realize what possibilities the future holds in store.

Well! All this first-class, excellent reasoning for getting rid of the present Board of Admiralty, who have failed egregiously in every single detail, as above enumerated, has by a masterly piece of low cunning been side-tracked into a vulgar brawl by the *Morning Post* and kindred politicians as to how old I am! My age, my personality, and my present status in keeping a chemist's shop in Cockspur Street having nothing whatsoever to do with the imminent risk to our former assured naval supremacy by a big German naval surprise . . .

Yours,

Fisher

Postscript. I have just heard that it was one of the sloops that the Germans sunk by a German destroyer on the Dogger Bank and that we had no destroyers out at all! Balfour's whole time is given to the Army. He sent over here for one of our naval officers yesterday, kept him an hour talking of the German trenches and the new plans they had as surprises for us!

As to the shipbuilding, I forget if I have mentioned to you that I had arranged as time went on to bring in men from various outside trades to push on the *Furious* and four other battle cruisers, and I reckoned I would have had them ready this spring, before the ice was clear in the Baltic, where I proposed to use them, owing to their very light draught of water, in the big plan I've mentioned to you. I believe the Admiralty contend that I started such a lot of vessels that they could not cope with them! and yet they allowed Lloyd George to take men away! On the contrary, the Admiralty ought, as I intended, to have brought more men in!

Secret

February 14th, 1916

Dear Jellicoe,

The enclosed is a résumé of my reasons for being disquieted, which I am keeping for the *appropriate* moment.

Yours,

F.

P.S. I hear that Asquith has received a somewhat similar memo. from another quarter quite unknown to me!

[Enclosed memorandum]

Secret

SPECIAL CAUSES OF GRAVE ANXIETY IN THE PRESENT NAVAL SITUATION

Mr. Balfour stated recently in the House of Commons that '*What Germany is doing in the way of shipbuilding must necessarily be a matter of conjecture*'! That is so. We know nothing. But the Germans know all we are doing, owing to the deplorable step taken by the Admiralty, at the instance of the Foreign Office, in allowing foreign correspondents to visit the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow and the destroyers and submarines at Harwich, etc., etc. In particular is there danger from the neutral representative who attended. What earthly reason could have prompted this astounding folly cannot be even conceived!

It being the fact that we don't know what the German shipyards and Krupps' Gun Works have been so busy about these eighteen months of the War, we are led to make the following surmises:

Certainly it is warship construction that has occupied the German shipyards, as German mercantile shipping in millions of tons is lying idle.

I. The German armed fast cruiser of 25 knots speed which recently captured the *Appam* and other of our merchant steamers may have many sister-vessels escaped or escaping to our trade routes. It is lamentable that the fast 32-knot cruisers intended to have been ready now in a few weeks have been so delayed, so hopelessly delayed that they will not be available to cope with these swift German commerce raiders. The fast dreadnought battle cruisers *Furious* and her sisters were going to be pushed by successive additions of men commandeered from other sources as would have had them fighting this spring. *The Furious won't be ready this year.* How are the Admiralty going to cope with, say, 10 of these fast German

commerce raiders escaping to every sea? An answer is requested. It is no use sending tortoises to catch hares. Millions of tortoises won't catch one hare! The only thing that caught von Spee off the Falkland Islands and annihilated his Squadron was the swift, big dreadnought battle cruiser!

II. It may be accepted as absolutely certain that the Germans have constructed big submarines, so designed as to be able to force the defences of Scapa Flow. Where is the British Fleet going? It can't stay there. How many submarines have we laid down? Is it only six? How many?

Schwab, at my instigation, built submarines in 5 months that went without convoy to the Dardanelles from America. Have we continued Schwab? *No! Why not?*

III. But there's another reason the British Fleet can't stay at Scapa Flow. The radius of action of the new Zeppelins easily include Scapa Flow, and they are immune from any attack yet devised by us, as they attain a height of 15,000 feet and at that height are faster than aeroplanes (which first of all take an hour to get up there), because aeroplanes, owing to the rarefied atmosphere, have to fly at a constant angle.

IV. The 4th cause of grave anxiety is the multiplication of German destroyers and their increasing superiority to British destroyers. I leave it to the Commander-in-Chief of the British Grand Fleet to say if *now* he views with confidence meeting the German High Sea Fleet with the present proportions of destroyers, if the German shipyards have been more busy building destroyers than have the British Admiralty. If the British Grand Fleet to-morrow met the German High Sea Fleet, would not the present known British inferiority be very great and exceeding perilous? So why has the immense effort made between November 1914 and May 1915 to multiply the British destroyers been discontinued? It is no answer to say Mr. Lloyd George has taken away the men from the shipyards. He should not have been permitted to do so, any more than to take from the Admiralty their former command of steel and shipbuilding materials!

V. The 5th cause of anxiety follows from the British Censor having permitted the whole secret of the monitors being divulged by Mr. Ashmead-Bartlett in his letter from the Dardanelles, and so probably the Germans will have pushed rapidly (as capable of construction very quickly) fast vessels of this type with big guns, which may very seriously affect our war dispositions.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

VI. The 6th cause of anxiety lies in the extremely probable arming of the new German battleships with a heavier gun than any yet afloat in the British Grand Fleet. Mr. Balfour admits '*there is no particular difficulty in this*' having been done!

VII. The 7th cause for anxiety is the apparent laxity of war direction shown by slow British cruisers being caught on the Dogger Bank by fast German destroyers when H.M.S. *Arabis* was recently sunk by a German destroyer. Why were not English destroyers there? Why also during the Zeppelin raid did we fail to get the wrecked Zeppelin — a matter of priceless value to have obtained the secrets of Zeppelin construction.

VIII. The 8th cause of anxiety is the false policy of dissipated naval strength in every sort of gimcrack expedition, instead of concentration and a big plan of war in the decisive theatre.

IX. The 9th cause of anxiety results from the lamentable (*one might almost say criminal*) folly in not steadily pursuing a mining policy and so closing the North Sea more effectively than any blockade. Between November 1914 and May 1915, most energetic and effective steps were successfully taken to fit very fast ocean-going mine-layers and provide mines in very big quantities, and certainly, had the mining policy been carried out, it can be vouched for that on one occasion certainly a most terrible disaster would have overtaken the German High Sea Fleet.

X. The 10th cause of anxiety is the most serious of all. Apathy, lethargy, irresolution, and stupid dissemination of naval strength, and an utter absence of imagination and audacity in conceiving vital blows, war-ending blows, on the enemy! We wait till we are kicked. We don't even kick back again. We put on a tin plate so that it shan't hurt so much when kicked next time. All our measures are preventive — Zeppelin and otherwise. It's a losing game to be on the defensive.

274: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

February 14th, 1916

Burn this.

Dear Lambert,

The Captain who lunched with you at your Club came to see me last evening, and he is of opinion that the one man in my path is the

King, and I've no doubt he's right. He can't accomplish, *but he can prevent!* So the whole crew, Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Jellicoe, Carson — whatever good intentions — have not the courage of Winston, who said: 'You be d—d'!

The 'fashionables', headed by the *Morning Post*, rally round this focus, and so they prevent effectually, and one feels like Elijah driven out into the wilderness, 'and he came and sat down under a juniper tree, and he requested for himself that he might die'!! — discarded, cast out, wasn't it human of him? However, he did afterwards go up into Heaven! 'A chariot of fire and horses of fire.'

Yours,

F.

275: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square
February 15th, 1916

Secret

My dear Jellicoe,

I bombard you with these letters *because I am so increasingly anxious!* Why this continued delay in fulfilling the definite promise that you should appear before the War Council to discuss the present naval situation? Is it an adroit stratagem to permit the 'Fleet' anxiety and consequent right agitation to 'fizzle out' by some new, but indifferent crisis haply happening? (Such as some new American waste paper from President Wilson!)

But this letter is for a specific detail I have not hitherto sufficiently impressed on you. Many, many months ago, I spent some hours with Mr. Balfour, and think I convinced him that a new invention enabled a submarine of big dimensions, carrying a 15-inch gun, being built in 6 months, I having made all the requisite arrangements for so doing, and I volunteered to come back for 6 months to the Admiralty as Third Sea Lord to carry it out, and then retire again into private life. We had experimented with a submarine at Ardrossan, and actually submerged her horizontal from rest and brought her up again marvellously successful and most convincing. It was then that Mr. Balfour (*possibly inadvertently!*) said, quite kindly, to me: 'If once you put your foot inside the Admiralty, where should we all be?'! I asked that you should be consulted, and I believe you were! *and that*

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you approved. The vessel might be nearing completion now. She has not been begun! Imagine 10 seconds to rise and fire a 12-inch or 15-inch gun, and 5 seconds to disappear! Why, the German High Sea Fleet in Schilling Roads would utterly disappear!!!

But *that* is not the point of this letter! The point of this letter is this: There are Germans or pro-Germans very closely connected with our affairs, and it is astonishing and marvellous how the Germans spy! and how utterly ignorant (as Mr. Balfour's reply about the 17-inch gun indicates) we are as to German naval doings! Suppose the Germans have constructed such a type. *Why not?* What about your safety, the safety of the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow? I was Captain of the Fleet to Sir Geoffrey Hornby [1885] when, at Berehaven, the semi-submerged ram *Polyphemus* smashed through the biggest boom ever formed by man as if it were pack-thread!

Yours,

Fisher

276: TO H. H. ASQUITH¹

36, Berkeley Square
February 18th, 1916

Secret

My dear Prime Minister,

In view of Sir A. K. Wilson having attended the recent War Council before which Sir John Jellicoe was summoned to give his opinion on the naval situation, as outlined in my two letters to you of January 22nd and January 24th [January 24th, 25th] — in both of which I urged you that Sir John Jellicoe should be summoned — I am very sorry you did not also permit me to attend, to enable me to elicit from Sir John Jellicoe his views on the opinions I had expressed regarding the present naval situation.

I do not know what passed at the meeting, or what conclusion was reached, but now that you have heard Sir John Jellicoe I feel it incumbent on me to write this further letter to you giving my view of the actual position in more detail, because in my decided opinion

¹ This letter was prompted by a visit from C. P. Scott, who had talked to three Cabinet ministers present at the War Council meeting of February 17th to which Jellicoe had been summoned. They had received the impression that Jellicoe was 'satisfied' with the Admiralty administration, had no anxiety, and that, accordingly, his visit had ended in a 'fizzle'.

the present naval situation is fraught with great danger. You told me in the lobby of the House of Commons some weeks ago that you intended to consult me on the general naval situation, so presumably the matter was troubling you, *and well it may!*

I have now to make the statement that in the immediate future, instead of our former assured victory over the German Fleet, the possibilities of what the Germans can have done in the last eighteen months — I have no official knowledge of what they have actually done — render doubtful the issue of a battle between the British and German Fleets, if the British Fleet be weakened, as it may be, in its journey south to meet the German Fleet. In the first three months of the War we did little with our huge shipbuilding resources to counter-vail all possible German naval efforts in the direction of strengthening their Navy, and in the last nine months of the War we have also been supine, and have allowed men to leave our shipyards, instead of largely increasing their numbers with the set purpose of immensely increasing our destroyers, our submarines, our mine-sweepers, and our small craft generally, and of completing the 15-inch battle cruisers *Renown* and *Revenge* during the early spring, and the *Furious*, with her 18-inch guns, and her sister dreadnought battle cruisers by the early summer.¹ The *Furious* will not now be finished this year, unless exceptional exertions are made at once.

As I mentioned to you in my letters of January 22nd and January 24th, the British Fleet runs a great risk, if the German destroyers, etc., exist in the numbers possible, while the destroyers building in the Country are being so lamentably delayed.

If Sir John Jellicoe did not state this fact to the War Council, he ought to have done so, because when he meets the German Fleet at close quarters on his arrival south, the British Fleet may have been so weakened owing to the deficiencies in destroyers and small craft as might necessitate Sir John Jellicoe declining action, or else result in our defeat if action is joined.

I am fully aware there is nothing so exasperating to other people as recounting the fulfilment of one's own prophecies. I only do so to support my present prophecy as stated in the immediately preceding paragraph.

¹ Jellicoe, sent a copy of this letter, had found only this sentence open to dispute. 'We are really relatively stronger now than at the beginning, even in T.B.D.'s, though still hopelessly weak in this respect and in mine sweepers; but still it is open to anyone to produce figures to show our position is better now than a year or 15 months ago. Our victory was *not* assured then, nor is it now. I pointed it out more than once a year or more ago, always mentioning the destroyer inferiority' (Jellicoe to Fisher, February 28th, 1916).

On April 24th, 1912, I wrote the strongest protest possible to Mr. Winston Churchill against the proposed employment of Sir Berkeley Milne as Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean, predicting disaster in the event of war if the appointment were made. This disaster occurred in the escape of the *Goeben*; she threatened to bombard the Sultan's Palace at Constantinople, and this resulted in Turkey joining our enemies, and led directly to the Dardanelles, followed by Salonica, and finally to the disastrous attempt to reach Baghdad in order to cover the evacuation of Gallipoli.

Six months before the War I handed you a paper on the submarine menace. It was completely fulfilled, though scouted at the time, and the First Lord of the Admiralty said it was *marred by the statement 'that submarines would sink merchant ships with their passengers and crews'!*

I represented the terrible drain the Dardanelles would cause in our naval resources, deflecting them from the decisive theatre of the War. It is not too much to say the present hazard in the North Sea would be very appreciably less had all the vessels that were diverted to that expedition been kept at Sir J. Jellicoe's disposal. It is impossible in a short memorandum to explain the many ways in which the Dardanelles have drained the Grand Fleet.

The blockade and the mining policy, set forth in representations in January 1915, were ignored with disastrous results.

More than a year ago, at a meeting of the War Council on January 7th, 1915, I pointed out the danger of the Zeppelin menace, and went so far as to place my resignation in the hands of Mr. Churchill, because of my certainty of their raiding and scouting possibilities, and my conviction of the inadequacy of the steps that were being taken to meet the menace, but was induced to withdraw it as being against the public interest that I should do so at that time and on such a subject. The Zeppelins now, with a radius of 600 miles and capable of attaining a height of 15,000 feet, with a speed of 70 to 80 miles, can attack the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow with impunity, as present British aircraft are of but little use against them. Perhaps even a greater danger is the ability of these German Zeppelins to disclose, by wireless, all the movements of the Grand Fleet, and so to render impossible any surprise attack of ours by keeping all our Fleet dispositions known to the enemy.

Then comes the fulfilment of the prophecy that the dreadnought type of battle cruiser — the '*all-one-big-gun*' ship of *very high speed* — would knock out all other types when war came. This was exemplified in the destruction of von Spec's Squadron at the Falkland

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Islands, when the British Admiral annihilated von Spee's Squadron and had not one man killed or wounded in his flagship, the dread-nought battle cruiser *Invincible*.

I mention the above merely to show that hitherto my opinions deliberately expressed have been worthy of some attention, and I repeat again that in my view the menace of the German Fleet is greater than any that has ever threatened the existence of the British Empire, and that immediate drastic steps are vital, in order to meet this menace.

Fisher

February 26th

P.S. I am sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Balfour, in view of his always cordial attitude towards me. I wrote this letter more than a week ago, but have held it over to give it all possible consideration before sending it in — and to avoid any appearance of hasty action.¹

F.

277: TO J. L. GARVIN²

February 19th, 1916

Secret, Private and Personal
Please burn.

My beloved Friend.

Come to 36, Berkeley Square at 5 p.m. on Tuesday next for 2 hours. You are right! We are at the very blackest period of the War. Cease your activities — a War Man is *not* wanted! Wait till Tuesday, I'll show you the proofs!

The enclosed will interest you from Schwab's agent.³ Directly I arrived at Admiralty on October 30th, I sent for Schwab. He is head of the Bethlehem Steel Co., in the United States, and controls 50,000 workmen. I told him we wanted submarines, and big guns

¹ In fact, Fisher's reason for holding up the letter was his desire to get the reaction of Jellicoe and Hankey. He had the latter's only by the 26th, and it was entirely favourable. For Jellicoe's reply, see Letter No. 279.

² Garvin had written on February 18th that he was 'profoundly uneasy . . . *it is in my bones that their [the German] stroke will be swift, able and strong.* . . . [But] without evidence one cannot write gravely enough to cause panic'.

³ Albany F. Petch had written Fisher on February 16th: 'Like every other non-political man, I sincerely wish you were back in charge. Nowadays it is my experience that every decision is sat upon for a month, *instead of an answer in two minutes as in your time*, and what is worse still — *decisions are indecisive!*'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

for monitors. He sent the submarines across the Atlantic, without convoy, to the Dardanelles (an unprecedented feat) in 5 months! The record time for a submarine had been **14** months in this or any other country. Schwab is now idle, and we want more submarines! Don't you think it lovely, what this man says!!! '*Decisions are indecisive.*' Worthy of a Yankee!

My opinion is that you are a traitor to your Country if you don't put the following words into this week's *Observer*, and, for God's sake, don't mention Fisher!

The Nation will sweep this Government into the gutter and worse also, if there is the very faintest suspicion that the Grand Fleet is not, in all its items, unchallengeably supreme, and assured of victory over the German High Sea Fleet.

I, for one, will brand you if this imminent disaster comes off!
Yours, till the Angels smile on us,

Fisher

278: TO C. P. SCOTT

February 19th, 1916

Dear Mr. Scott,

Two side-lights! Lady Jellicoe called on Lady Fisher and told her spontaneously that her husband was very depressed and had told the War Council on Thursday that unless he had more destroyers there would be a great disaster! And yet you say you were told the War Council '*were satisfied*'!

Secondly, Northcliffe told Sutton, his secretary, last night (Friday), who told Captain Crease,¹ that he did not mean in any way to intervene in the naval discussion, and (so Crease says) Northcliffe expressed a hostile spirit towards me, although he came to my house a few weeks since and told me it was essential and vital I should be back, and he intended to have me back!

Thirdly, I enclose you a letter this moment come from Garvin.

I wrote out a telegram to you but did not send it. 'Cease your activities — a war man not wanted.'

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Crease was Naval Assistant to the Chairman of the B.I.R., 1915-1916.

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279: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
February 22nd, 1916

My dear Lord Fisher,

... The man who told you of the views of the three Cabinet Ministers present at the Council must have been incorrectly informed, as the question of whether I was satisfied with Admiralty administration was never raised or put to me. It could hardly be put to me in the presence of the 1st Lord and 1st Sea Lord!! I stated my views on the lamentable shortage of destroyers and other small craft as strongly as I could. Apparently the Admiralty view is the same as mine, and so far we are in agreement, which possibly is what your informant meant. It is not my place, I think, to go beyond that. I am still most seriously disturbed at the shortage of small craft, and the last return sent me is even worse than anything I saw before. It only reached me yesterday. What is wanted is a very energetic and pushing person whose sole business is to see that the Navy comes first in the labour market, until our position in this respect is secure. It is not at present, as I have constantly said.

I am as convinced as yourself that the Germans have plenty of surprises in store for us.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

280: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Board of Invention and Research
February 27th, 1916

My dear Lambert,

Thank you for your hard labour for me! I'm ashamed to cause you this trouble! Rosebery in the sweetness of his heart took me for a walk this morning, and wants me to go to Bath with him, but I tell him I've been 'sent to Coventry'! Rosebery considers Meux's speech¹ very vulgar, and that it will recoil on him. He reminded me that George III was bitterly antagonistic to Nelson, and that one

¹ Admiral of the Fleet Hedworth Meux had resigned his Portsmouth Command in February and, through an uncontested election, taken his seat as a Conservative M.P. I cannot find the speech referred to.

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reason of Nelson's immense hold on the people was they thought him hardly used and badly treated and ill-appreciated! Rosebery took me home with him to show me all his lovely Nelson relics, so I scored by Meux's attack!

Now don't bother any more. *I wear the impenetrable armour of contempt and fortitude!* We've got to wait for the Day of Judgment!

Fond love to the Prophetess!

Yours till a cinder,

Fisher

Rosebery said to me, What would you do for this terrible submarine menace? So, like Abraham Lincoln, I gave him a parable. If there's a plague of wasps, you don't send out a mass of little boys with gauze nets to catch individual wasps! **YOU TAKE THE WASPS' NEST!** That's what our bloody fools aren't doing!!!

P.S. Meux is full of lies! I never had the faintest idea of Hood¹ leaving Dover till I saw it in the paper, and the rest of his stories equally tinged with malicious omissions! I will tell you, when we meet, what I saved him from in China, and so could Lord Knollys!²

281: TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE HANKEY

36, Berkeley Square
March 2nd, 1916

My dear Hankey,

I feel I have done all that is possible in writing to the Prime Minister, and he kindly replied to me from Walmer Castle last Sunday that my letter would have his serious attention and that he had himself already written a memorandum on the serious state of the Grand Fleet in its want of destroyers, etc.³

I further wrote and told him the day before yesterday of Colonel House's information obtained when he was recently at Berlin, of the

¹ Rear-Admiral the Hon. Sir Horace Hood had commanded the flotilla based upon Dover to co-operate with the British and Belgian armies, 1914-(May) 1915.

² The first Viscount Knollys, Private Secretary to King Edward VII, 1870-1910, and to King George V, 1910-1913. Meux had been Commander-in-Chief of the China Squadron, 1908-1910.

³ Asquith, replying to Fisher's letter of February 18th, had written on February 27th: 'The delays in construction, especially of small craft, are undoubtedly serious . . . since Sir J. Jellicoe attended the War Council I have myself circulated a memorandum on the subject, which is engaging my serious attention.'

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assiduous and unceasing German efforts during the last 18 months to prepare several naval surprises for us, and of a probable early essay by the German High Sea Fleet to do something in conjunction with the German military efforts in France.

Note this: no amount of Cabinet or War Council instructions are of the slightest use if those who have to carry them out are totally wanting in 'push' and 'initiative'! *There must be ginger at the top if you want ginger at the bottom!*

So it's no use my hanging about London having nothing whatever to do beyond attending to the Chemists! I am going next Monday evening for some weeks to Balcombe Place, Balcombe, Sussex. Telephone number is Balcombe 3. If I am wanted, I can be with you in one hour by motor car.

Yours,

Fisher

282: TO H. H. ASQUITH

36, Berkeley Square
March 2nd, 1916

Secret

Dear Prime Minister,

I have just received your invitation [March 2nd] to attend the meeting of the War Council next Tuesday [March 7th],¹ and if the object is to obtain my advice how to remedy the serious state of affairs pointed out in my letter to you of February 26th, I shall, of course, gladly attend, but if the purpose is to cross-examine me as to numbers of vessels, etc., then I would prefer not to attend, for the reasons given to you previously.

I can only maintain as before that possible German naval ship-building in the last 18 months, and our supineness, has jeopardized the naval situation, and I presume Sir John Jellicoe's evidence has established this fact. I am sorry I was not summoned to meet him, as I informed you, to hear him personally, consequent on my own lack of detailed official information, which, of course, is always at his disposal.

Yours truly,

Fisher

¹ Hankey 'confirmed that you are summoned to the War Council because of the determined insistence of Mr. Lloyd George' (Crease to Fisher, March 3rd, 1916).

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283: TO CAPTAIN THOMAS E. CREASE

March 7th, 1916

Private and Confidential

Dear Crease,

Many thanks for your letter about Hankey. *He does not seem to have told you all!* I heard (*after receiving your two letters*) that ALL THOSE PRESENT considered it quite settled (*before the War Council broke up*) that I was to attend next meeting *and were ALL very much surprised not to find it stated in the minutes!* the inference being that the omission was due to Balfour (*after the meeting broke up*), and apparently Hankey was with Balfour before coming to me at 10.30 p.m. (and not Masterton-Smith only, as he inferred to me). This is a very wicked world! The War Council is postponed till Wednesday, so apparently the Prime Minister wrote to me without consulting Balfour when he fixed Tuesday with me, as Balfour had the Navy Estimates fixed for that day.

And now Winston appears on the scene to attend a big Club dinner in his honour *by both political parties* on Sunday night — a friend of his came to see me last night — and he is to follow Balfour on Tuesday on the Navy Estimates. My friend was dining with Winston last night. Apparently all we hear has to be accepted on the underlying principle that I am to be kept out AT ALL HAZARDS! SUCH WAS MY INFORMATION LAST NIGHT! . . .

Northcliffe has written a letter from France yesterday to a friend of mine very greatly praising the *British Weekly* for supporting me, and urging me to speak in the House of Lords *and expressing his attachment to me!* If you see the solution of the conundrums it is more than I do!!

I am coming to Victory House at 11 a.m. on Monday to prepare a statement to read out to the War Council on Wednesday, as I am URGENTLY ADVISED not to allow myself (*as Jellicoe was*) to be misrepresented, and consequently a written statement handed in at the Meeting is obligatory to prevent it being said I was satisfied . . . I simply propose to repeat my letter sent to the Prime Minister on February 26, written on February 18, and decline any controversy as to comparative numbers or whether the Admiralty are now doing their best.

Yours,

F.



PORTRAIT BY AUGUSTUS JOHN. 1910

March 9th, 1916

Private and Secret

My beloved Jellicoe,

I went to the War Council yesterday.¹ Five Admiralty officials with masses of papers to swallow me up! But the Prime Minister, having himself in his own writing circulated a memorandum to the Cabinet that the position of the Grand Fleet owing to lack of destroyers, was 'PERILOUS'! made my task easy.² Balfour & Co. tried a lot of red herrings to no purpose!

Isn't it interesting how personal attacks (IF LEFT ALONE) always rectify themselves? *Vide* Winston's amazing change of front towards me! His speech in the House of Commons was really wonderfully good.³ HE HELD THE HOUSE ENTHRALLED! Balfour was terribly faltering and halting in his speech. I had an ovation as I left the Peers' Gallery. All the M.P.s got up and cheered me as I walked out, and the Speaker did not stop them!

Beresford is to make a fierce attack on me to-night! I take no notice of him. (*Never throw a stone at a yelping cur! He only yelps the more!*)

They told some lies about you in the War Council not wanting the five big cruisers I started. At one moment it was fixed, I believe, to ORDER YOU to be First Sea Lord and Madden as Controller, but Winston's attack bust up this plan, as then it had to be said that Jackson and Tudor were Angels!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

¹ Fisher had handed a brief memorandum to the War Council, of which these are the key passages: 'Every possible means should be taken to accelerate all vessels in hand, and others should be laid down and pushed forward with all rapidity in every vacant building slip in the Country. But all is of no use unless some suitable person is placed in dictatorial command of the whole building programme with unrestricted powers and untrammelled by anyone whatsoever. It is also vital that without a moment's delay the British Fleet and all its attendant vessels should be brought home from the Mediterranean and that sea left in charge of the French and Italian Fleets, whose force is immensely superior to that of the Austrian Fleet. . . . I have not been wrong hitherto and I am not wrong now in predicting a naval disaster unless drastic action is taken, and I repeat, never has the existence of the British Empire been so menaced as at the present juncture, because of the possible German naval surprises in store for us.'

² Asquith's reaction was far from favourable. C. P. Scott reported on a chat with the Prime Minister on March 8th: 'Then at last he [Asquith] began to reply. Fisher had been there that morning at the War Council, and they had heard what he had to say. What did it amount to? His answer was a contemptuous ejaculation and gesture, casting thumb back over shoulder as though to get rid of dirt' (Hammond: *C. P. Scott*, p. 195).

³ Churchill had returned from France to deliver a long and critical speech (March 7th) on the conduct of the naval war, urging Balfour to take more vigorous measures against the mounting U-boat campaign, and ending with a bombshell: advice to the First Lord to 'vitalize and animate his Board of Admiralty by recalling Lord Fisher to his post as First Sea Lord'.

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285: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
March 9th, 1916

Private and Confidential

My beloved Lambert,

Thanks for your letter. *You've hit the nail on the head!* What will end the War is 'STRATEGY'!!! Fancy, we have over half a million soldiers locked up in unattackable Egypt and useless Salonica, where only two Austrian divisions are opposed to us, and we have a huge British Fleet out in Mediterranean to look after these soldiers WHO OUGHT TO BE IN FRANCE, AS THE GERMANS WILL SHORTLY BREAK THROUGH! Imagine the millions of tons of mercantile shipping taking coal, provisions, and munitions to our Fleet and Army in Mediterranean! IT'S APPALLING!!!! The mass of fighting vessels uselessly in Mediterranean that ought to be with Jellicoe to make him safe, *which he is not*, and so I told the War Council yesterday, and they didn't like it!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

286: FROM LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

Committee of Imperial Defence
March 9th, 1916

My dear Lord Fisher,

... Your appearance had exactly the right effect of dotting the 'i's' and crossing the 't's' of Jellicoe's evidence. I cannot overstate my own gratitude to you, not only for coming yesterday, but for the persistence with which you have by letters and personal interviews compelled the War Committee to probe these matters to the bottom. I am not allowed to show the conclusions of the War Committee to anyone (*outside the Cabinet*) except those officially concerned in taking action, and this rule I am bound to observe. But I can assure you that the results of these meetings have exceeded my most sanguine anticipations, and only to-day I have received information of satisfactory results. As you know, though, some time must elapse

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before the situation can be rendered fully secure, and unremitting vigilance will be necessary.

Once more your country owes you a debt of gratitude, not merely for what you have done but for the patriotic manner in which you have avoided any publicity, which might help the enemy, and compelled the highest authority to take the matter up. . . .

Yours ever,

M. P. A. Hankey

287: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

36, Berkeley Square
March 9th, 1916

My dearest,

I lunch joyfully with you next Monday. AS USUAL your dear letter most sweet! Is it not all a miracle?¹ But the real value of it all is that it has brought Balfour out into the open, and what was conceded in honeyed phrases is now revealed! Namely, 'that no earthly consideration will ever induce him to have that d—d iconoclast back at the Admiralty'! (However, your dear Reggie has ALWAYS said this!)

I love you!

Yours for evermore,

F.

288: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

March 11th, 1916

My dear Winston,

I've slept over it! I've thought of nothing else! If any specious twaddle about honour, or Asquithian jugglery, persuades you not to rise from the corner seat of the Front Opposition Bench next Tuesday [March 14th] to brand the Government with the massacre of our troops and the utter ineptitude of the conduct of the War, then I say you become the murderer, because you are the one and only man who it is absolutely certain can prevent it and can voice the

¹ The 'miracle' was Churchill's change of front in his Commons speech.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

removal of Kitchener, and so if not Prime Minister (which I am SURE you will be), then you can be War Minister. NEVER was there such an opportunity. *Fate has led you straight to it!* Had you the very faintest idea when you left France that the Prime Minister with his own hand had written Jellicoe's condition as 'PERILOUS'? Had you then the faintest idea that both 'Coalition' and 'Labour' would be utterly smashed by the *seething discontent* of the masses! (the splendid Osborne, alas! killed, told me of it as coming when he went to canvass for Pemberton Billing [in] Mile End) and I begged you to ask George Lambert!

Great occasions necessitate great risks! To the Public, Balfour has trounced you! *You've got to trounce him by another flank movement! He has got to be discredited*, or he will be the alternative Prime Minister, with Asquith as Lord Chancellor. *Via the Army Estimates you can do it! Stick at nothing! Speak on Tuesday.*

Yours,

F.

P.S. This is my last word. *I won't bore you again!*

289: TO H. H. ASQUITH

36, Berkeley Square
March 15th, 1916

Secret

My dear Prime Minister,

I have returned to the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence the manuscript notes taken at the Meeting of the War Committee on 8th March, at which I was present at your request.¹ According to the notes, the discussion was largely devoted to labour questions, and only incidentally to the matters which I had been summoned to discuss, as set forth in the letters to which you referred in your opening remarks, and especially in the formal communication giving my views which I addressed to you, dated 18th February. I demur to some of the statements that were made by the Admiralty

¹ Hankey informed him that day that his 'corrections and remarks on the manuscript will be embodied in the final record in every detail', and that, unless he heard to the contrary, this letter to the Prime Minister would be circulated to the War Committee.

representatives, and I also desire to amplify my remarks on some of the points raised, and therefore I beg to request that this memorandum may be printed and circulated to all who were present at the meeting.

I have stated in previous communications to you that, in my opinion, the Grand Fleet is dangerously short of destroyers and small craft of all types. The First Sea Lord admits that there is a shortage, which will compel caution as regards the Grand Fleet. You informed me at the meeting — though it does not appear on the notes — that all were agreed that there was a serious (I think you used even a stronger word) shortage of destroyers and small craft. My statement is therefore admitted generally. Having in view that the Admiralty acknowledge that they have no information whatever as to what work is in progress in German shipyards, though it is well-known that these have been working at extreme pressure throughout the War — in itself an alarming and somewhat astonishing admission — it is evident that the Admiralty acknowledgment of a shortage becomes even more momentous if, as is quite possible, large and unexpected increases of destroyers appear with the German High Sea Fleet shortly.

The reason for the existing shortage in destroyers is that the Admiralty have not maintained the punctual and accelerated delivery of those ordered by their predecessors; the reason for the existing shortage of mine-sweepers and small craft of other types, and for the probably accentuated shortage of destroyers for many months to come — for all the War, unless drastic steps are taken — is that the Admiralty have failed since last June to continue to place orders for these vessels to the utmost extent possible as slips became vacant.

It was stated that the reason for the vessels being late in delivery, and for not ordering more, is the shortage of labour, and also that the majority of the men who left the shipyards left while I was at the Admiralty. It was not, of course, my business to deal with labour questions as First Sea Lord. But I wanted the ships, and I meant to have them, and therefore I told the builders to come to me personally if they got into any difficulty or met with any obstacle that was likely to delay the completion. In the spring of last year I received some complaints from these shipbuilders that men were being allowed to leave them to join the Army. I took up the matter personally with Lord Kitchener, and he gave me an assurance that instructions would be issued to recruiting officers not to take any more men from

shipyards without the consent of their employers. For the remainder of my time at the Admiralty I received no more complaints from any shipbuilders who were employed on urgent work. Further, arrangements were made at this time for the transfer of men from mercantile building yards to yards where they were required for naval work, especially on the Clyde. It would be interesting to obtain a statement of the numbers of men employed, for example, at Clydebank and Fairfield, where the *Renown* and *Repulse* are under construction, on 1st November 1914 and on 1st June 1915, respectively. I should say that they were increased at least 50 per cent, though it was stated at the meeting of the War Committee that the amount of labour was reduced while I was at the Admiralty!

It is an entirely fallacious statement that delay in the delivery of one vessel is any reason why others should not be ordered at the same time in the same yard. The men who finish a ship do not do the early work on her, and so long as the vessel is launched and the slip vacant, another vessel can be commenced with little or no interference; there is no reason whatever why succeeding vessels should also be late. It is not surprising that there will be a shortage if these principles have been followed.

Although not pertinent to anything that I have advocated in my communications to you, I notice that the Third Sea Lord stated that all the large slips had been filled by my programme, and consequently no more ships of the largest size could have been laid down. I arranged for Cammell, Laird & Co. to lengthen one of their slips to 1,000 feet, and hoped to have laid down on this slip a new type of fast battle cruiser last summer. This slip has been ready since last summer, and, I am informed, has been vacant ever since! There are also other slips that could have been made suitable in a short time, if the Admiralty wanted to use them.

I was always being told at the Admiralty that things could not possibly be done. But they were done! The same arguments appear to hold the field again. I was informed that the *Invincible* could not leave Devonport (to attack von Spee's Squadron) for two days after the day appointed, because of some defect in the brickwork of her boilers. But she went, and I have not heard since of any ill result! Had those two days been lost, von Spee would have been missed by two days at the Falkland Islands and many things would have been changed. I was told, on arriving at the Admiralty and finding that no new submarines had then been ordered since the War broke out, that it was impossible for anybody but Vickers to make the engines,

and that for this reason and many others the possible output was very limited. Nevertheless, within a few days large orders were placed with many shipbuilders who had never built submarines or engines before, and I am informed that these are being delivered and are quite satisfactory. I was told that the monitors could not be built in time, and I could cite many examples where the so-called impossible was achieved.

It is an astonishing statement to me that the present difficulty at the Admiralty is in getting the machinery completed, and that there is no difficulty about the hull work. It was very much the reverse formerly, and there were practically unlimited offers for machinery if the hulls could be built elsewhere. I am convinced that this difficulty could be overcome. There should also be no difficulty in getting every destroyer completed and delivered in twelve months from the date of the order, provided that the firms are given a free hand and are not harassed by rules and regulations that may be very necessary in time of peace but are quite out of place in time of war. I am told that when I left the Admiralty everything was 'regularized' again, and all matters were directed to be sent through the proper channels! In consequence, the ships are delayed — but no doubt some money is saved, and a lot of trouble to officials.

It is evident, from what I heard at the meeting, that my original statement is correct and that the Admiralty have in the past nine months allowed men to be taken from the shipyards, and have allowed men to be taken who should have been put into the shipyards instead of being sent to the Army or to munitions work. It is also certain that up to the last few days no effective steps have been taken to repair these errors, and to obtain back from the Army the men who are so urgently needed by the shipyards, etc., for new construction and repairs. It is apparent, too, that nothing effective has yet been done by the Admiralty regarding dilution of labour in establishments working for them, from the fact that the formation of a committee to consider this question was suggested in my presence at the War Council on 8th March.

It is also evident that the Admiralty have not continuously ordered destroyers and small craft whenever there was an opportunity, because it was stated at the meeting that a number of destroyers had just been placed with shipbuilders and negotiations were in progress for more to be laid down at once. This is undoubtedly the result of the attention which has been drawn to the subject recently by myself and others, and it would not have been possible if the Admiralty

had continuously ordered new destroyers whenever there was an opportunity.

I desire also to state, before leaving this subject, that many more destroyers and small craft could have been laid down of all kinds in the autumn of 1914 when I returned to the Admiralty, and consequently would have been completed or nearly completed by now, had it not been for the decision of the Cabinet, communicated to the Admiralty by the First Lord, that no vessels were to be commenced that could not be completed by the end of 1915. This decision was modified later — but had it never been promulgated, many other firms who had not previously been employed at this work would have then been utilized, such as those named by the Third Sea Lord, with manifest advantages at the present critical period. For this reason, also, there was never any question, so far as 1914 is concerned, of laying down anything larger than a light cruiser.

On the subject of the light battle cruisers *Courageous*, *Glorious*, and *Furious*, I have no hesitation whatever in reaffirming that, had I remained in a position to superintend their construction, the two former would have been finished in May and the latter in July. They would have been laid down and finished earlier, but for the restriction mentioned in the previous paragraph! These vessels were designed and built for a special strategical purpose, but nevertheless they will be extremely valuable for general work with the Grand Fleet. It is not necessary here to go into details, but in my opinion they will be worth a great number of light cruisers and destroyers to the Commander-in-Chief, both before and during a general action. I am sure the Commander-in-Chief will not dispute this. They were never intended to replace heavy battle cruisers of the 'Lion' type, and it is merely obscuring the issue to discuss them from that point of view. They are supplementary to such ships. The same applies, but in less degree, to the *Renown* and *Repulse*. It may, or may not be, the case that more heavy battle cruisers are required, but this has no connexion whatever with the building of these light battle cruisers.

When I returned to the Admiralty, I found that there were no battle cruisers under construction after the *Tiger*, and that the battleships coming forward after the 'Queen Elizabeth' class, all of which were then approaching completion, were the 'Royal Sovereign' type, slower than their predecessors and fitted to burn coal, instead of oil only. Why this design was adopted I do not know, unless it were for economy. It was not possible to change the general design of the whole class, as the construction of most of the ships was

too far advanced. I did, however, manage to arrange for oil-burning only in all, which will considerably improve their speed. The two latest, the *Renown* and *Repulse*, were only just commenced, and it was found possible to stop the work, to alter the design, and to use up most of the materials. These two ships were accordingly turned into light battle cruisers, and the construction hastened so that there was every prospect that they would be available for service in 15 to 18 months. There is reason to believe that the *Repulse* will be ready, but I understand that the same pace has not been kept on the *Renown*, and that she has been allowed to fall behind like the 'Courageous' and 'Furious' types.

If there is a shortage of battle cruisers of the 'Lion' type at the present moment, it is evident that this must arise from miscalculations before the War. There could not possibly, under any circumstances, have been such battle cruisers ready for service now in the near future that had not been laid down long before the outbreak of war. The Board of Admiralty in the period before the War is alone responsible for any possible deficiency in this respect. Personally, I have always been strongly of opinion that all the 'Royal Sovereigns' *should have been battle cruisers, which are the dominating type of the day*. But, nevertheless, I would most certainly, had it been left to me, have pressed forward the building of battle cruisers of the largest and most heavily armed type in the period since last May, in view of the uncertainty that came about as to the duration of the War, the lack of knowledge of the German programme, and the necessity for being prepared for all eventualities. I had the design of this type fully prepared and a model made just before I left the Admiralty. The necessary labour could have been procured if sufficiently energetic action had been taken, and the order placed judiciously.

In my opinion, however, ships of the 'Repulse', 'Courageous', and 'Furious' types were MORE required, *at the time and under the conditions when they were commenced*, than heavy battle cruisers, especially having in view the rapidity with which they could be finished and in service, whereas the heavier type could not under any circumstances be built in under two years. My views on this point have not changed, *and I consider it a calamity that any of these ships have been allowed to fall behind in their dates of delivery*.

I do not know whether more 18-inch guns of the 'Furious' type have been ordered for succeeding ships or not, and so as to be ready for emergencies. I personally pressed the First Lord to order more last September, but I understand that nothing has been done. In

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my opinion, they will be wanted, if only for swift monitors, supposing the heavy battle cruisers have not been proceeded with. I also do not know whether anything has been done to increase our resources for constructing guns and mountings of 18-inch, or even larger. I understand that only at Elswick can 18-inch guns be built, and that the plant of none of the other big manufacturers, i.e. Woolwich, Vickers, Coventry, or Beardmore, is capable of dealing with guns of this size and weight. I know that we had to order a special large crane-lighter for use at Elswick Shipyards in lifting the *Furious* guns. Unless some action has been taken since last May, then the position still remains that the only establishment capable of dealing with these guns and mountings of the largest size is the one which is most susceptible of attack and destruction by Zeppelins, and much valuable time has been lost.

I have noticed that the First Lord has stated that the ordering of the monitors has caused delay in the completion of the 'Royal Sovereign' class of battleships, owing to the 15-inch guns being taken for the monitors. So far as I am aware, only two monitors have been armed with 15-inch guns, and each with a pair of guns only. Therefore, four guns and two barbettes, or one-half of the mountings and guns of one battleship only, were taken for these monitors. These armaments were ordered to be diverted early in 1915, and could easily have been replaced in time for the last ship of the class. It was also contemplated to build two more monitors with 15-inch guns, but I understand that this was cancelled when I left the Admiralty. In all these matters I write under the disadvantage of having no exact official knowledge of the building programmes since I left. It is possible that the speeding of the *Renown* and the *Repulse*, and the ordering and hastening of the *Courageous* and *Glorious*, have been a cause of delay with the guns and mountings of some of the 'Royal Sovereigns', coupled with the building of the two monitors. This however, is a totally different matter. This is not a case of diverting materials from a capital ship to a subsidiary service, but of diverting from one capital ship to another, from a slow battleship to a very fast battle cruiser, where the guns and mountings can be more profitably used. I make no suggestion, and I have never heard of any suggestion, that there is a deficiency of battleships, either now or in the near future. The monitors have proved their value, and this is an unnecessary side issue which obscures the important facts of the present position.

There is a further matter to which I did not have opportunity to

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allude at the War Committee, in connexion with submarine design and construction. I was not satisfied even with the large and powerful new types of fleet submarines which were designed and commenced while I was at the Admiralty, and I gave instructions for a still larger type to carry a heavy gun of 12-inches, or even larger, to be looked into and a design obtained. Had I remained at the Admiralty, I would have urged that a number of these should be proceeded with as soon as possible. Designs of a submarine to carry a 12-inch gun were ready last August, and I personally urged the First Lord to have the vessels proceeded with. Since that time the question has been considered and referred and delayed, so that I understand that only in the last few weeks has an order been placed, and for one submarine only. I consider that at least six should be commenced at once, and pressed on with the utmost possible dispatch, so as to be completed by the end of the year.

For facility of reference I enclose a copy of my letter sent to you dated February 18th last.

Fisher

290: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

March 16th, 1916

Secret

My beloved Jellicoe,

I send you herewith my '*considered statement*' (as they call it) sent to Mr. Asquith, *who has gone to bed!* (So there is a crisis on of some kind, I don't know what! except that one of his colleagues [McKenna] has told me the Government can't last many weeks longer!)

The account of my attendance at the War Council sent to me for correction was ludicrously inadequate. I fully agree in your letter of March 11th. Unless drastic steps are soon taken, we shall be having bread and sugar tickets in England, as now in Germany. It is absolutely inconceivable our having NOW OVER HALF A MILLION of British soldiers in an UNATTACKABLE Egypt and at Salonika, where the total force against us consists of *two* Austrian divisions! This mass of British troops necessitates MILLIONS of our mercantile shipping in the Mediterranean which should be employed in bringing us food, besides being an immense target for the German submarines in the Mediterranean and necessitating an enormous waste of our

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naval resources in convoying them. *The whole strategy of this War is inept beyond belief!* Without doubt the Germans are very soon going to astonish with some big naval surprises!

Ever yours,

Fisher

Yesterday I received a communication that you and I had irretrievably quarrelled and that you were moving heaven and earth to prevent my having anything whatever to do with public affairs. Percy Scott gave me the information and swears he had it from an influential quarter!!!¹ *I keep silent.* I never said one word to Winston Churchill after his malignant attack on me three months ago in the House of Commons, and, lo and behold, without my ever saying a word he retracts it all! So will it be with all other lies!!!

291: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square
March 24th, 1916

Private

My dear Jellicoe,

I send you a hasty line to hope you got a letter I sent you a week ago under cover to Dreyer sending you a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister dated *March 16* [15]. Let me know please whether you got it.² After being suppressed for a week by Balfour's request, it has now been circulated with his rejoinder, which I have not seen; but I am told by Hankey there is much bustle at the Admiralty and battle cruisers have now been laid down (*rather late in the day!*), as well as a mass of other vessels. BUT IT IS ALL PAPER!! *There will be no 'PUSH'!*

I understand another big expedition has been launched from Alexandretta to relieve General Townshend in the Tigris. When you

¹ According to Sir Percy Scott, the story was being spread by Beresford and the Tories (Fisher to C. P. Scott, March 15th, 1916).

² He had. 'I thought', he replied on March 27th, 'the letter you enclosed expressed matters very clearly indeed. I hope it will bear fruit in the way of getting the work hastened, but the reports I get of the workers who are engaged on repairs are anything but encouraging.'

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know the history of Tigris expedition, it almost beats the Dardanelles! (Engineered by Balfour under Slade's advice against Townshend's protest! I've seen Townshend's letter.)¹

Of course the 'God-send' has been Tirpitz's dismissal at *one hour's notice*! He was bent on sending out the High Sea Fleet this very week with a big landing force. There are 300,000 good German troops collected near Hamburg *always ready to embark*.

But what is the use of writing or talking! There is irresolution everywhere in everything, *and ALWAYS 'TOO LATE'*.

Yours,

Fisher

292: TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

Balcombe Place
March 26th, 1916

Secret

Dear Hankey,

Many thanks for your letter and I realize the sacredness of your communications to me. Nevertheless it don't seem right for me to admit that 'the whole controversy is finished so far as the War Committee is concerned', for the naval situation still remains as dangerous as the Prime Minister admitted it to be (he used a stronger word!), and it's only the marvellous interposition of Providence in dismissing Tirpitz at an hour's notice which has delayed or possibly stopped altogether (as his successor² has no nerve) that big onslaught at sea which I alluded to in my letters to the Prime Minister. . . .

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Vice-Admiral Sir Edmond Slade, at the Admiralty for 'miscellaneous service', later for 'special service', 1912-1920 (at this time he was apparently acting as an adviser to Balfour); Major-General (afterwards Sir) Charles V. F. Townshend, commanding the 6th Indian Division, Mesopotamia, 1914-1916, had been invested in Kut since December 9th, 1915. Kut fell on April 29th, 1916. Fisher attributed the 'damnable Tigris fiasco to Balfour trying to get to Baghdad to cover the evacuation of Gallipoli' (Fisher to McKenna, March 24th, 1916). 'Austen Chamberlain [Secretary of State for India, 1915-1917] was made to say that everyone "CONCURRED" in the advance on Baghdad. *Of course, everyone had to CONCUR! - or they would have been "booted out"*' (Fisher to Lambert, March 24th, 1916).

² Admiral Eduard von Capelle had succeeded Tirpitz as Secretary for the Navy, 1916-1918.

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293: TO ADMIRAL ALFRED VON TIRPITZ¹

March 29th, 1916

Dear Old Tirps,

We are both in the same boat! What a time we've been colleagues, old boy! However, we did you in the eye over the battle cruisers and I know you've said you'll never forgive me for it when bang went the *Blücher* and *Von Spee* and all his host!

Cheer up, old chap! Say '*Resurgam*'! You're the one German sailor who understands war! Kill your enemy without being killed yourself. *I don't blame you for the submarine business.* I'd have done the same myself, only our idiots in England wouldn't believe it when I told 'em!

Well! So long!

Yours till hell freezes,

Fisher

I say! Are you sure if you had tripped out with your whole High Sea Fleet before the Russian ice thawed and brought over those half-a-million soldiers from Hamburg to frighten our old women that you could have got back un-Jellicoeed?

R.S.V.P.

294: TO ARCHIBALD S. HURD

Balcombe Place
March 29th, 1916

My dear Hurd,

Your article is delicious, but no one reads articles nowadays. Criticism is at an end — Parliament is gagged — the Press is frightened — the Public apathetic — as the Germans have not yet ravished their women and life in England is as usual!

I have the credit of sending Asquith to bed with 4 letters I wrote. Balfour got them suppressed for a while, and so the effect 'fizzled out' as regards the immediate effect, but they will be d—d unpleasant some day. I wish you could read them. Lloyd George says he has

¹ 'On hearing of von Tirpitz's dismissal I perpetrated the following letter, which a newspaper contrived to print in one of its editions. I can't say why, but it didn't appear any more, nor was it copied by any other paper!' (*Memories*, pp. 30-1 n.).

never read anything like them! But what good? There is no 'push'! Passivity, as Winston said, is the Admiralty motto, and the Germans are sinking ships freely. I am vegetating here. I find it maddening being in London — powerless and cast out — and yet never in such vigour in all my life! And such a new complexion could be given to the War!

The 'God-sent' fall of Tirpitz at one hour's notice is another proof we are the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. The German Fleet would have been out this week with the new moon and all England frightened by half a million of German soldiers in the Hamburg transports — and Jellicoe can't stir a yard without being spotted by the new Zeppelins, whose radius of action goes far beyond Scapa Flow, with bombs that wouldn't leave much of Jellicoe if dropped on the *Iron Duke*.

January 7, 1915, I resigned on this Zeppelin menace and put in a paper predicting the present situation to the War Council. But I was forced to remain. I also foretold the *Goeben* 4 years ago on April 22, 1912! A lovely letter!¹

Colonel House suggested my going to America. I think I may.
Yours always,

Fisher

...

295: FROM THE EARL OF ROSEBERY

38, Berkeley Square
March 30th, 1916

Private

My dear Admiral,

I thank you warmly for allowing me to see these precious and formidable documents, though they bring my temperature down to zero. Is any heed paid to your letters?

I know that the great Duke of Wellington in the Forties used to send to every new Secretary for War and the Colonies a reasoned and alarming memorandum on the defenceless state of the country. These were all pigeon-holed, acknowledged and ignored.

¹ Fisher to Churchill. See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 450-1. 'We also had a d—d fool as Chief of the Staff at the Admiralty [Sturdee], and a very silly telegram he sent gave the poltroon the excuse for running away and pretending his ship wanted coal at Malta. It is perhaps the most damnable episode of the War, and no one punished, and the truth never known' (Fisher to Yarrow, February 10th, 1918).

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I dare say you are an awkward subordinate! but I should like to see you First Lord of the Admiralty. So you would be, in any nation but ours.

Fortunate, indeed, is the country, and opulent in high capacity, that is able to dispense with Lord Fisher in a gigantic war. I wish I could think that embarrassment of riches was the cause.

Every one has been kicking Winston because he is down. But to me there is something magnanimous and creditable in his coming down and pressing you on the Ministry after his previous speech. But he ought to have given his reasons for his change of view, instead of producing it like a rocket.

I only returned to this Square from Bath yesterday. I hope you have not deserted it, for I counted on seeing you.

Yours always,

Rosebery

296: TO C. P. SCOTT

Balcombe Place
March 31st, 1916

Private

Dear Mr. Scott,

Some business connected with an important invention necessitated my having a prolonged interview with Mr. Balfour yesterday afternoon in company with the President of the Royal Society and some others, and he was so MARVELLOUSLY cordial and friendly towards me personally and took my side so decidedly against all the Sea Lords that I came to the conclusion this was a very wicked world, as all the time he is suppressing my letters, which are printed and ready for circulation to the Cabinet, *but he withholds them!!*

So far as I can hear there is no prospect of Winston Churchill's return. He has wrecked himself! (*And the story is that he has wrecked me also!*) Such I heard yesterday was Mr. Balfour's opinion, and hence I suppose his cordiality!!! . . .

Yours,

F.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

297: TO SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON NICOLL¹

36, Berkeley Square
April 5th, 1916

My dear Friend,

Owing to your being so occupied with 'a demure and wicked' Duchess, I had no chance yesterday of talking to you of the very serious future before us as regards our food supply, owing to our want of foresight in preparing to deal with the advent of bigger German submarines, just as we are similarly dropping behind in other big war developments. You heard McKenna say 100,000 tons of British shipping had been slaughtered between March 1st and April 2nd, and the sinking of neutral shipping equally affects us. *At this rate we shall soon be starving! Is nothing going to be done?* Jellicoe writes me to-day the German destroyers have much bigger guns than ours! (so he finds by the size of the holes their shot made in our destroyers the other day)!² *This should not be!* And the print in which I point out these things is suppressed! *There is a limit even to Providence!*

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. Any time whatever you like to fix I will be at 36, Berkeley Square, whenever you want to see me.

298: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square
April 6th, 1916

Secret and Private

My beloved Jellicoe,

Many thanks for your letter. I knew about the Germans placing bigger guns in their destroyers, and yet that idiot Tudor don't appreciate it! But really the slackness at the Admiralty and old A. K. Wilson's retrograde pervading influence makes me morbidly

¹ Nicoll, Editor of the *British Weekly*, 1886-1923. Fisher had first met him in February.

² 'I hear from the south that the German T.B.D.'s we chased to Zeebrugge had 5.9" guns aft. The holes in *Lance* [destroyer] show this. They are learning the value of the big gun, if true, and will have carried out a similar policy in light cruisers, etc.' (Jellicoe to Fisher, April 1st, 1916).

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low-spirited! However, Providence may yet come along and help us, as heretofore!

Balfour was MOST EFFUSIVE to me last Thursday and told a friend of mine only yesterday *he could not praise me too highly!!* But all the same he has suppressed that letter I sent you, which is in print, *but the circulation of it cancelled!* You have a copy. The Tigris advance to Baghdad was solely due to Balfour (*advised by Slade*), but the fact is being concealed and all is put down to Nixon,¹ who was far away. The General on the spot (Townshend) protested strongly. I've seen a letter from him to that effect. But the Government wanted to get Baghdad to cover the evacuation of the Dardanelles! (I was lunching alone with Asquith when he told me we had got Baghdad!) I got rid of Slade as a fool when he was D.N.I. [1907-1909].

I lunched with McKenna on Monday. He told me 100,000 tons of British shipping had been sunk by German submarines between March 1st and April 2nd. I had a splendid chap for the submarine-hunting called Donaldson, but the Admiralty sent him away, just as they sent Masterman away,² who knows more about airships than anyone living! *Such is life!* Apparently THE ONE ONLY MAN who realizes the gravity of the German submarine menace, as well as the possibilities of the Zeppelins and probable immense development of German destroyers, is Runciman!³ *But what is one among so many!!!* The real traitor is Bonar Law (*and I told him so in a letter of which I kept a copy*), who sold himself and his party to Asquith. There is no alternative Government possible now! No opposition, no criticism.

Yours,

Fisher

¹ General Sir John Nixon, commander of the Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia, April 1915-January 1916.

² Captain (afterwards Admiral) Leonard A. B. Donaldson, who had been assigned to the Admiralty for 'special service', 1914-1915; Wing-Commander (afterwards Air Commodore) Edward A. D. Masterman, with the Air Department of the Admiralty, 1914-(March) 1916.

³ Walter (afterwards first Viscount) Runciman, President of the Board of Trade, 1914-1916, later famous for the 'Runciman Mission' to Czechoslovakia in 1938.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

299: TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY¹

Board of Invention and Research
April 10th, 1916

My dear Hankey,

It's more than three weeks ago since it was approved by the Prime Minister to circulate my letters; but it not having been done, I propose, unless the print has already been circulated, to send a manuscript copy to those present on March 8th. Here we are at April 10th — nearly five weeks! I think I am justified in doing this! *I've never known such a long delay!*

Yours,

Fisher

300: TO C. P. SCOTT

36, Berkeley Square
April 16th, 1916

Private

Dear Mr. Scott,

A line to tell you that Lord Ranksborough came specially to see me yesterday to say he had just been with Dr. Jameson, of South African fame, who told him he had just been seeing Bonar Law and Carson, and they thought political situation very critical for Asquith. *However, I feel certain Asquith will weather the storm!* Also Admiral Sir Charles Madden came to see me, *just from Jellicoe* (he is his Chief of the Staff and would be his successor if anything happened to Jellicoe). He told me that never in all his life had Jellicoe been so fit and well and in such good spirits and more confident. Dr. Jameson had told Ranksborough one hour before that he knew for a fact that Jellicoe was *played out!* And inferred he had heard it from high and authoritative sources. What is the object of so malignant a lie I can't conceive! Also Jameson told Ranksborough that the Tory Party would never allow me to hold any office whatever (*that had been decided!*).

¹ Hankey had expressed his 'great disgust' to the Admiral (April 6th) 'that the Admiralty had not yet produced their rejoinder, and consequently that your paper has not yet been circulated. . . . The cause of the Admiralty delay is the collection of some information by the Controller'.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

This is amusing, as before the Coalition I was approached! However, say nothing about this, nor does my personal future matter!

Providence will arrange!

Yours in haste,

Fisher

301: TO COMMODORE CHARLES DE BARTOLOMÉ

36, Berkeley Square

April 18th, 1916

Dear Bartolomé,

When you lunched with me the other day I had intended mentioning to you that rumours had reached me of an Admiralty design having been adopted reverting to the pernicious 'MIXED' armament (as it is generally termed!). NOT AT ALL A BAD NAME! as those who go in for this armament are terribly 'mixed' in their fighting ideas! IN FACT THEY ARE IDIOTS! but not quite so idiotic as the further lunatics who go in for less than 32 knots speed. But I may be misinformed; in that case put this letter in your wastepaper basket; but if not, then kindly hand to Mr. Balfour as my solemn protest. And I enclose a lovely speech spoken on the spur of the moment by Bacon, when Custance had made an ass of himself by suggesting a sort of Spithead Fort (and about as fast) as a British battleship.¹ However, Custance, Noel & Co. were patriots in disguise — they humbugged Tirpitz!

Yours,

Fisher

Replicas of the *Furious* with 20-inch guns is the type, capable of being built in a year, if pushed and no fads — just built like oil tankers! (Oil tankers don't sink!) The 20-inch gun is feasible — I can guarantee that!

¹ Enclosed was a print of a speech by Rear-Admiral Bacon at the annual meeting of the Institution of Naval Architects, March 12th, 1913. It was a plea for, and restatement of the case for, the all-big-gun battleship. See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 494, n. 1. The 'Spithead Fort' reference is to the four sea forts erected at Spithead in 1862 — large, circular structures mounting one or two heavy guns and a number of smaller ones. 'Battleships on the mud', they were called.

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*

April 21st, 1916

[sent on April 26th]

My dear Lord Fisher,

... I do not notice any real difference in the building output as the result of the War Council meeting. For some time I have been even more concerned that mercantile building should be pushed ahead than that war ships should be, and I said so at the War Council. A year ago now I started writing about this. The result so far has been nothing beyond conferences between various Government Departments, so far as I can see and hear.

The Government seems to be shaky, but the Prime Minister has apparently succeeded in staving off the evil day once more. I am afraid I have no faith in politicians of either side. The only successful alternative Government would be one which is non-political.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

...

36, Berkeley Square

[April 22nd? 1916]

Secret and Private

Please burn.

My beloved Jellicoe,

Had I only known (but you were, of course, wise not to tell me) what you wrote to the Prime Minister, I could have 'butted in' with immense effect! I heard of your being in London but purposely did not endeavour to see you. As usual (*and as last time when you were summoned to the War Council*), these politicians will get the better of you! Balfour has summoned all the journalists to meet him next Tuesday in secret sitting to have 'soothing syrup' and to be THREATENED!

When the history becomes known to the Public of the apathy ever since May 1915 in pushing on destroyers, etc., and inadequately dealing with the German submarine menace, then there will be such

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

a torrent of public frenzy that will sweep away all the incompetents who are responsible.

Yours in haste,

F.

If you ever allow yourself to be cajoled in leaving the command of the Grand Fleet, you will BETRAY your country! I will try and find a copy of Baltic paper to send you. SECRET. We have a new gas for sea use which makes my plan certain sure!

304: TO C. P. SCOTT

April 27th, 1916

Secret and Private

Dear Mr. Scott,

. . . George Lambert has just telegraphed to me from House of Commons now at 5.30 p.m. . . . He tells me that Redmond¹ made a most splendid speech on the Dardanelles fiasco, and the utter iniquity of the Government in holding on to the Dardanelles, knowing the slaughter could have no useful purpose! Asquith, *but especially Balfour*, and also Kitchener (all three), ought to be shot! for Winston, with all his faults, said '*Well! if you are not going on with it, clear out!*'

I've just sent Rosebery one day's diary of this comic war — of 7 cases in one day of the Germans taking the offensive by land, sea, and air, and we have not taken one single offensive step with an unchallengeable Navy! I hear Balfour has had all the Editors to-day to see him, to try and persuade them that *all is splendid!* . . .

Yours,

Fisher

305: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square

April 29th, 1916

Secret

My dear Jellicoe,

I got your letter sent me April 26th last night. It is quite true, as you say, that there has been no real difference in building output as the result of your recent attendance at the War Council, as alluded

¹ John Redmond, the moderate Irish political leader.

to in my letter to the Prime Minister of February 18th, or of my attendance thereat on March 8th. And I also knew you fully concurred with me, and had said so to the War Council a year ago, that the mercantile shipbuilding should be pushed ahead, but so far nothing has been done except conferences between various Departments. The real sin was the Admiralty apathy and negligence in permitting the Army to denude the shipbuilding yards of skilled labour (and in that I include the Board of Munitions). I have shown that I added some 50 per cent to the men building the fast battle cruisers *Renown* and *Repulse*, in reply to the charge that these men were leaving the shipyards even while I was First Sea Lord! The moment the shipyard managers told me that the Army were recruiting their men I personally intervened with Lord Kitchener and got it stopped. It is a vain reply of the Admiralty to say that, though 1½ million tons of mercantile shipping have been destroyed by the Germans, yet 1½ million tons are at this moment in course of construction. *It is 'the rate the ships are built at', not the number of ships laid down!* It is a dialectic subtlety! ['In other words, a lie! — F.']¹

But alas! it is true that '*words, not deeds*' keep the office-holders in power! and I am in absolute accord with you in your pious, but alas! impossible, desire for a non-political conduct of the War! But the eye of the politician is necessarily fixed upon whether such-and-such a war programme will '*rope in*' the Labour Party — whether we shall '*rope in*' the Germans is secondary! A political triumph is more accounted of than sinking von Spee! Our faith is the same, my beloved Jellicoe, and the only reason we shall win this War is because we are the Lost 10 Tribes of Israel! As I asked Madden to tell you, we are not right in the types of war vessels the Admiralty have recently laid down in such feverish haste in consequence of the letters to the Prime Minister from our two selves, nor are they being vigorously pushed! (*How can old women push?*) But for a speech or a memorandum to the Cabinet it is all lovely, and never was there such vigour at the Admiralty since the days of Pitt as now! Such was the '*Apologia pro vita sua*' (*the apology for his continued existence at the Admiralty*) offered yesterday by Mr. Balfour to over a hundred journalists gathered in the Admiralty Board Room from the highways and hedges and compelled to come in, '*and yet there was room*' in those saddened journalists' minds (when they left) at the three disastrous admissions that Mr. Balfour had to make to them *for a return to the Churchillian energy and impetus!*

¹ Marginal comment on a copy of the letter; similarly on p. 344 and elsewhere.

I. That there was an insufficiency of fast battle cruisers to enable German raids, such as that recently [April 25th] on Lowestoft by the German battle cruisers, being dealt with at all, except by our submarines. 'We've got to grin and bear it till Lord Fisher's five fast battle cruisers are completed, and *then* look out!' But why did Mr. Balfour, when he came disastrously into office, suspend and delay those five fast battle cruisers? *There is no answer!* And now feverishly more are being laid down, but they are of the '*Snail and Tortoise*' type and have not the speed for the job. ['The speed of these ships has now been increased' — F.] This is why I tell you the wrong types of war vessels are being laid down, and no imagination and no audacity in conceiving new types, and no 'push' whatever in accelerating their completion! So you observe we are to go on having our bottoms kicked by the Germans by raids of the German battle cruisers on the East Coast.

II. The second Balfourian admission was that the German Zeppelins so largely dominate the whole North Sea area that the British Grand Fleet can't stir out of its lair without detection. So any offensive movement is greatly hampered, IF NOT PRECLUDED ALTOGETHER! Why has no single word of explanation been given for dropping the building of our airships in JANUARY 1910, or punishment meted out to those who stopped it? On the contrary, Sir A. K. Wilson (the chief offender) is honoured and trusted and directing the Admiralty war policy to a large extent. He has his room at the Admiralty, and is in hourly converse with the Chief of the Staff.

III. The third fearful admission by Mr. Balfour to the journalists was that the Baltic is now sealed against us! (BUT WE OUGHT TO HAVE GOT INTO THE BALTIC LAST SUMMER!) You have read the print I submitted to the Prime Minister on this subject on January 25th, 1915. THE PLAN WAS ARRANGED! but was blasted by the Dardanelles exhausting all our resources instead of our concentrating our efforts in the decisive theatre of war in the North Sea and Baltic! You have the print — please study it again. IT IS IRREFUTABLE — but it was suppressed, just as the submarine print was also suppressed that was given to the Prime Minister 6 months before the War.

Lastly, and *with a most ghastly likeness* to Mr. Birrell when he said the Dublin Rebels were '*well in hand*',¹ so Mr. Balfour stated '*that the*

¹ The reference is to the Easter rebellion that broke out on April 24th, staged by the Irish extremists, the Sinn Feiners. Though Birrell, who had been caught unawares, issued a statement on the 25th that the situation was well in hand, that was not the case for several days. His obvious incompetence led to his resignation as Chief Secretary for Ireland and retirement from political life.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

German submarine menace was well in hand'. When an average now *at this moment* of 4,000 tons a day is being sunk by the Germans, I rather incline to think they have got US 'WELL IN HAND'!

Mr. Balfour began his unprecedented apologia to journalists (*disclosing all the features of the War to them*) at 3.45 p.m. and ended in an ominous silence at 5.30 p.m., and his hearers left him desponding! At least I met three of them in the street 5 minutes afterwards, and their faces were as long as the maintop bowline!

Yours,

Fisher

306: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

April 30th, 1916

Secret

My dear Jellicoe,

I've been waiting to reply to your enquiry as to when you will get the Selenium Cell Invention until some further experiments had developed. I enclose you interesting letters from the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth [Colville], the officer in charge of the Submarine Department there [Captain Candy], and from Professor Bragg, F.R.S., one of the greatest living scientists.¹ . . .

Of course the principal work of Professor Bragg is the sound detection of submarines, about the success of which he is quite sanguine — indeed the work seems accomplished. It is so very simple and ingenious that when the sound is exactly equal on both sides, then you know you are steering direct for the enemy submarine, and, of course, if you have two vessels some distance apart, then you practically fix the position of the enemy submarine by cross bearings! . . .

The other developments of the Selenium Cell are going on in various directions. Besides the correspondence with Portsmouth which I enclose, a very acute Commander Dawson has a lovely idea of putting the Selenium Cell in a small inexpensive balloon carrying bombs. When the Germans put the searchlight on the balloon to fire at it — bang goes the bomb on their heads! The French military authorities have it in use for exploding mines, but it wasn't sufficiently complicated for our military experts — they just revel in

¹ Indeed he was. William (afterwards Sir William) H. Bragg was Quain Professor of Physics at the University of London, 1915-1923, and a Nobel Prize winner in 1915.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

wires and batteries and the marvels of Maskelyne and Cook [magicians], or I think now it's a man called Davenant at the Queen's Hall! It really is quite a funny war, only it's so tragic!

Our very great loss in the development of the Selenium Cell was poor Osborne being killed. As you know, I had arranged for him to come up to you with his ideas of a giant torpedo and bombs and an aerial torpedo he was mad on — all worked through the agency of the Selenium Cell. However, when Moses went to Heaven, Joshua got on all right! *Only I haven't got Joshua as yet!*

Yours,

Fisher

...

307: TO?

LORD FISHER'S MEMORANDUM ON AIRSHIPS AND ZEPPELINS

May 1st, 1916

Secret and Private

When Lord Fisher ceased to be First Sea Lord on January 25th, 1910, he left a big airship under construction, obviously experimental, so failure was no condemnation, only an incitement to improvement, and thanks to Admiral Bacon's splendid advocacy all seemed prosperous for the production of an Air Navy.

It has never oozed out (except at a dinner table) how the airship programme was killed, but Sir A. K. Wilson said the 'May Fly', this first airship, was in her shed and would never leave it!

(Now at this moment we are feverishly building eleven at a cost of several millions sterling!)

Directly I returned to the Admiralty on October 30th, 1914, I ordered 38 airships of quick construction, and trained 38 selected midshipmen to navigate them. They have done splendidly. Commodore Sueter, Commander Masterman, and Commander Osborne are the three heroes who saw this business through. Their services are imperishable.

Mr. Balfour ordered 32 more of these airships when he became First Lord.

After Lord Fisher left, the Sea Lords met in Council to dish the airships, and selected a new Head of the Department who showed his

animus by calling it '*a Circus*'. (He certainly was the biggest Ass in his so-called '*Circus*'!)

Comatose inactivity prevailed from the period of the raid on Cuxhaven, destroying many Zeppelins, for a whole year! This was the result of the Sea Lords' Meeting in August 1915 and the appointment of Rear-Admiral Vaughan-Lee over the head of Commodore Sueter.¹ As for any enterprise, such as our previous air raids on the Lake of Constance, Dusseldorf and Cologne, it never once entered into the dull heads of my late colleagues that the 'offensive' in war is really quite a right theory!

Had we only gone on with the big airship programme as proposed by Lord Fisher in January 1910, what a splendid position we should now be in! Out-Zeppeling the Zeppelins! But Sir A. K. Wilson and others stopped it, because of the defects of the first airship, the '*May Fly*'. Because she was wrecked, nothing more was done! When the first submarine, *Al*, was wrecked, I got the Admiralty to order 30 more at once, and sent out every submarine next day to practise. That is the method of meeting failure.

Helpful criticism and encouragement is now sadly needed by the Admiralty Air Service.

The Parliamentary attack on March 9th was so obviously inspired that it would be quite interesting to know where the Sea Lords were dining the night before!²

Anyhow, the airship position has reached this stage, that Mr. Balfour told over a hundred journalists on Friday last, in a two hours' discourse to them about our entire scheme of war operations, that the Grand Fleet durstn't stir out of Scapa Flow for any surprise operation on the Germans, as the German Zeppelins (with their wireless) reported the British Fleet's every movement! The new German Zeppelins have a radius of 600 miles, can navigate at a height of 15,000 feet, and have a speed of 70 miles an hour. The 11 airships we are building can't touch them! It wants experience to get efficiency!

During the extensive trials of the first airship, the '*May Fly*', she was wrecked in September 1911, and Admiral Sturdee held a Court of Inquiry by Admiralty order.

¹ Rear-Admiral (afterwards Admiral Sir) Charles L. Vaughan-Lee had become Director of the Air Department at the Admiralty (-1917), but in September 1915 Sueter had been promoted to Commodore 1st class and put in charge of the matériel side of naval aeronautical work, with the new title of Superintendent of Aircraft Construction (-1917).

² The question of air policy had been raised in the House of Lords on March 9th by Lord Montagu of Beaulieu. He had stated that in 1917 Germany would have enough Zeppelins to meet all other powers, and that the only effective defence was to 'meet like with like'. The Government, he claimed, was not making adequate preparations.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

Admiral Sturdee's remark on seeing an airship for the first time in his life was:

'It is the work of a lunatic'!

and the Admiralty accepted his decision!

Nelson was called a lunatic, upon which George the Third remarked he wished he could bite his fellow Admirals! And by Admiralty letter C.W. 8457 of February 13, 1913, the 3 lunatics were dismissed: 'Your appointment as Inspecting Captain of Airships and those of Commander Masterman and Lieutenant Neville Usborne will terminate'! I wonder the Admiralty letter didn't end, R.I.P.! for these 3 officers gave no peace. And Sir John Jellicoe, to his eternal credit, resuscitated the rigid airship and went to Berlin and made a trip in a Zeppelin, and, in July 1913, by his exertions two rigid airships were approved.

History don't relate what happened next until Lord Fisher returned to Admiralty on October 30th, 1914, when 38 airships were immediately put in hand, but when he left on May 22nd, 1915, another 'set-back' occurred until the Zeppelin raids frightened the Sea Lords into the hasty action that breeds disaster and failure.

It is astounding how little is realized of the Zeppelin Menace, and how it militates against the action of the British Grand Fleet, and how it renders so easy the fast German battle cruisers bombarding the East Coast, and renders feasible a possible German Army Corps in the Thames estuary. But that is another story (as Mr. Kipling would say!).

What is it that ought to be in the Humber? And why ain't they there?

Yours, etc.

Fisher

...

308: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

36, Berkeley Square
May 18th, 1916

Private and Secret

My dear Jellicoe,

Since I wrote to you about a fortnight ago and cursed the new design of battle cruiser of the 'Snail and Tortoise' type, I find the

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

speed has been increased from 25 to 32 knots! *So that's all right!* And in answer to my representations, I had a message from Mr. Balfour that he fully concurred in Bacon's '*Decanter Stopper*' letter, of which I sent you a copy. Nevertheless, they are not to be 'FAST-BUILT' ships! They are 'complicated' and consequently draw too much water (*because everyone's 'fad' has been inserted*), and they have become *huge and unwieldy!*

But what is astounding me just now more than anything else is that, notwithstanding explicit orders to clear out of the Mediterranean which I urged in January last upon the Prime Minister, the Admiralty are still maintaining in the Mediterranean,

This does not include vessels for the defence of Egypt, or stationed at Gibraltar!	{	9 battleships.
		18 cruisers.
		19 sloops and gunboats.
		14 monitors.
		30 destroyers.
		8 torpedo boats.
		16 submarines.
		43 minelayers, sweepers, and service ships, etc.
		127 yachts and trawlers.
		123 net drifters.

This is really *prodigious!*

Imagine the stream of colliers and 'upkeep' vessels in a ceaseless procession feeding all this Armada from England, and what it means in taking mercantile shipping from feeding the Country! And yet the French and Italian Fleets are *each of them* far more powerful than the comparatively puny Austrian Fleet that has to be contained — (*it is never attacked!!*).

Mr. Balfour's letter to the Mayors of Lowestoft and Yarmouth is quite Chinese!¹ As you know, the Chinese wear hideous masks going into battle to frighten their foes!!

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Balfour's letter to the mayors (*The Times*, May 10th, 1916) was in reference to the recent bombardment of their towns and attempted to reassure their populations. It concluded: '... I have, I hope, sufficiently stated the reasons for my conviction that another raid on the coast of Norfolk (never a safe operation) will be henceforth far more perilous to the aggressors than it has been in the past, and if our enemy be wise is therefore less likely.'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

309: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square
May 25th, 1916

Private

My dear Jellicoe,

Your letter just come, and I am so glad to know you remonstrated at our keeping an Armada of over 400 vessels of sorts (*vide* May Admiralty Navy List) in the Mediterranean! As I said to you before — what an endless stream of our mercantile shipping (*so urgently demanded to bring our own food*) employed in feeding and coaling this big British Fleet in the Mediterranean, simply because the British Admiralty are so effete as to permit the French and Italians to black-mail us into so doing. THEY ought to be protecting the Allied trade in the Mediterranean, and NOT us! Each of them with a Fleet far superior to the puny Austrian Fleet, and yet we are compelled by them (in their funk) to keep 9 battleships, 18 cruisers, 30 destroyers, and endless others (totalling 407) to do their d—d dirty work! And so we lost the *Russell* battleship the other day! In addition to all this, we have almost rebuilt the French Navy in Malta Dockyard. Since the War began, Malta has been ceaselessly employed on doing the work of Toulon Dockyard! *This is a fact.* Mr. Balfour told the journalists this at his conference with them recently.

So far as I can gather there is no future for us but '*passivity*'! '*Attrition*' is to finish the War! That's the Balfourian-Asquithian Plan! Any other plan is turned down! Mr. Micawber waited for something to *turn up*! The Government is '*anti-Micawber*'! They wait and see what they can '*turn down*'! '*Wait till you are quite sure you are too late! And THEN GO AHEAD FULL SPEED.*' This is a procedure Napoleonic in its audacity and Cromwellian in its thoroughness! Give peace in our time, O Lord! (See Book of Common Prayer.)

Admiral Charlton, who ought to have been blown from a gun (instead of which he has been made a Commander-in-Chief),¹ and all his satellites in the *Vernon* made such a mess of our mines that we have now invited the Russians to let us have their mines, which act splendidly — so that's one bright spot!

We gave 74 millions sterling to our Allies yesterday in the vote of credit — we shall never get a penny of it back! And the Italians

¹ Rear-Admiral Charlton, who had become Commander-in-Chief of the Cape Station, 1916-1918, had served at the Admiralty with the rank of captain as Assistant Director of Torpedoes, 1911-1914.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

have not declared war against Germany, and we are loaning our mercantile shipping to Italy! *It's really all fit for Punch!!!* . . .

After spending a delightful hour with Queen Alexandra [May 19th] reminiscent of former happy times (she sent for me), I wrote enclosed to the Emperor of Russia (whom I know quite well), but I think I must be getting senile, as I did not send it! So I let you have it instead!¹

As I told Kitchener (to his shocking amazement), '*The careful man in war is Hell!*' Rashness in war is prudence. Prudence in war is criminal. You know as well as I do the beautiful landing sites for our British Army in Danish territory both sides of the Promontory of Schleswig-Holstein, and Corbett's *7-Years War*² tells you of the Pomeranian beach!

Well! Lay on your oars! That's war now! '*David ran to meet the giant!*' (*I Samuel*, Chap. 17, Verse 48.) War is '*audacity and imagination!*' What have we got instead? '*Wait and see!*'³

Yours,

Fisher

310: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

36, Berkeley Square
May 30th, 1916

Secret

My dear Jellicoe,

Sir Maurice de Bunsen, late British Ambassador at Madrid, came to me from Sir E. Grey to sign a ready-made interview with an American journalist praising the military conduct of the War! It is

¹ The letter reads: 'With humble duty to Your Imperial Majesty, Lord Fisher ventures to submit the enclosed correspondence for gracious consideration, in view of History repeating itself, if it be possible for a Russian Army to be landed on the Pomeranian Coast as in the time of Frederick the Great, who, for the only time in his life, gave up hope and sent for a phial of poison when the Russian soldiers landed so near Berlin. Let us absolutely fill the North Sea approaches to the Kiel Canal with mines, and then force our way with the British Fleet into the Baltic, taking friendly possession of Denmark and landing half a million British soldiers both sides of Schleswig-Holstein.'

² Corbett's book, *England in the Seven Years' War: a Study in Combined Strategy* (2 vols., London, 1907).

³ Asquith was depicted as the man of 'Wait and See' in the Northcliffe press.

so funny that I think it will amuse you and give your mind a change from more serious things!¹

The recent sinking [May 8th] of the White Star *Cymric* is one of our most disastrous ineptitudes! She had on board perhaps the most important cargo ever yet carried of special plant constructed by prodigious efforts in the United States for our munitions output in this country. The lathes and other special machinery she carried were valued at 1½ millions sterling, but she had no convoy and came jogging along as if it were peace! She ought to have gone by some abnormal route with a chain of destroyers, but our destroyers are in the Mediterranean because the French and Italian Fleets combined funk the little Austrian Navy and we have not the backbone to resist being blackmailed by France and Italy. And Italy has not declared war against Germany, and our British mercantile tonnage is lent by the British Government to carry supplies to Italy. I have a friend who recently (a fortnight ago) met a German General in Rome and said to him: 'I thought you were commanding a German brigade in Galicia against the Russians?' 'Yes,' he replied, 'but I've just come here to Rome to bring my wife and family here, as they will be more comfortable here than at Berlin, and I now return to Galicia at once'!

Read the enclosed unrecorded sacrifice of the *Zent*!² No newspaper has had it. The ways of the censor are the ways of the ostrich! Before we've done with it, there will be a revolution in England and '*Kings will be cheap!*' (like the fishmonger notifies salmon!)

However, no one protests, and the poor have never been so rich! The mass of pianos and chocolates bought by the working classes is now prodigious, and boys of 15 are getting actually three pounds a week! While the rich are, *by the end of this year*, going to drop 75 per cent of their income into the pockets of — well! I won't call anyone names! And our Allies are fleecing us, never to be repaid! And over 400 British war vessels kept in the Mediterranean! And a quarter of

¹ Sir Maurice de Bunsen (afterwards first Baronet), onetime Ambassador at Madrid (1906-1913) and Vienna (1913-1914), worked in the Foreign Office during the war as an Assistant Under-Secretary of State. As part of a Foreign Office programme of correcting 'enemy inventions and misrepresentations', he had written Fisher on May 25th, enclosing the text of an interview, 'which you could follow verbatim, or insert any amendments you think proper. If you think the wording suitable, it would of course carry very great weight appearing over your name. All you would have to do would be to allow Mr. Snyder of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* to call upon you at a convenient hour, and we would furnish you with a clean copy of the text — correct[ed] in any way you may desire — to be handed by you to him as expressing your views'. Fisher 'feigned a sweet diffidence and declined'.

² The S.S. *Zent*, a 3,890-ton merchant ship, had been sunk by a German submarine twenty-eight miles off Fastnet (an islet, the most southerly point of Ireland), April 5th, 1916, without warning and with the loss of forty-nine lives.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

a million of able-bodied British fighting men in France occupied as servants and grooms instead of being in the trenches. Half a million British soldiers in the trenches — $4\frac{1}{2}$ millions of British soldiers in the rear somewhere! *Are we much better on the sea?* But I refrain!

Yours,

Fisher

311: TO CAPTAIN THOMAS E. CREASE

36, Berkeley Square
June 3rd, 1916

Secret and Private

Dear Crease,

... I've declined to see *anyone at all* calling here about the [Jutland] disaster.

'After Cradock — von Spee'!

*'After Beatty — von Scheer'!*¹

'After bad war direction — good war direction'!

Tell me what Massingham² thinks of it all! And Beatty not waiting for his supports. And how slow ships (no matter how heavily armoured) *are no use!* Had the whole of Jellicoe's battleships been speedier, *how different the situation!!* The action began at 2 p.m. He (Jellicoe) only gets up at 6 p.m.!

But you see: there'll be an outcry for ships as heavily armoured as a Spithead fort! *That* will be *the* red herring! And why didn't Lord Fisher put on more armour? *Hang Lord Fisher!* The 5 fast battle cruisers might have been in this battle with wonderful results! The 18-inch gun! At a mile beyond von Scheer's range! Von Spee over again at the *Falkland Islands*. I talked to Watts this week. These 5 battle cruisers could have been *all* ready last month (May) if pushed as intended.

Yours,

F.

¹ Admiral Reinhard Scheer, Commander-in-Chief of the German High Sea Fleet, 1916-1918, in succession to von Pohl.

² Henry W. Massingham, Editor of *The Nation*, 1907-1923.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

312: TO JOHN LEYLAND

36, Berkeley Square
June 9th, 1916

Strictly Private and Confidential

Dear Leyland,

Do not fail to be at 41 Cromwell Road at 4 p.m. on Monday to see Winston Churchill.¹ My ostensible object in your seeing him is for you to say that you saw Jellicoe recently and for you to state what occurred, and Jellicoe's secret memorandum. *But the real object I have in view*, unknown to Winston Churchill, is for you to put forward YOUR views about the North Sea battle — *your 2 alternatives, which I consider correct*² — but Winston is, I think, wrong. However, remember he has seen all the Admiralty papers, but they are not complete, *nor do I believe he saw the initiating action of the Admiralty*, on which ALL depends! It was the Admiralty responsibility so to order the rendezvous of the different squadrons that Beatty was NOT overpowered.

Admiralty work the strategy.

Jellicoe works the tactics.

That's a great principle and is the justification for the wireless on the roof of the Admiralty. ALSO why did not the Admiralty send no splendid fast Atlantic liners immediately the German Fleet left harbour (now fitted as minelayers) to bar the return of the Germans, also 60 submarines on the same errand, and Commodore Tyrwhitt, who never went out with his magnificent flotilla of destroyers, so experienced in so many fights, and why [was] not Admiral Bacon with all his monitors busy while the Germans were out? NOTHING WAS DONE. *Rub this in to Winston.*

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Churchill had resigned his army commission and returned to England in June, feeling his duty lay at home. He had accepted an Admiralty assignment to write a semi-official 'appreciation' of Jutland.

² 'Two alternatives present themselves to me. Either we must deplore that the enemy was not allowed to get further north before being attacked, or we must say that Beatty was not provided with sufficient force for this business' (Leyland to Fisher, June 7th, 1916).

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

313: TO LADY JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square
June 9th, 1916

Dear Lady Jellicoe,

As I told your sweet, dear spouse this morning in my letter to him, I have refrained from bothering you with a letter till the first rush of grievous anxiety had passed away and victory was smiling instead of the miserable pessimism that was so ignobly spread abroad! Well! It has all been splendid certainly, though I fear some of it may be like the Balaclava charge, as described by Marshal MacMahon: '*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre*!'¹ However, I know nothing at all, except the newspapers, so I *don't allow myself to judge!*

Yesterday Lady Arbuthnot sent me a most pathetic letter from Sir Robert Arbuthnot, to be given to me if he died!² He was a favourite Midshipman of mine. It's heart-rending; *but yet it's very glorious!*

Give my fond love to Connie and same to yourself. How sweet you've been to Pamela.³ *I kiss you!*

Yours affectionately,

Fisher

314: TO VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

36, Berkeley Square
June 9th, 1916

My dear Beatty,

I've refrained [from] sending you my sincere and heartfelt enthusiasm till your first pressure of anxiety was over! I absolutely know nothing beyond what is in the newspapers, but it is sufficient to make one feel very glorious as to the magnificent courage of all concerned! and that when you got them by the throat you didn't let them go! Rashness in war is prudence! as prudence in war is criminal. Heaven bless you! Don't trouble to reply, but all my thoughts were with you.

Yours,

Fisher

¹ The 'Charge of the Light Brigade' at Balaclava in the Crimea, October 25th, 1854, immortalized by Tennyson; but Marshal Bosquet, not MacMahon, was the author.

² Arbuthnot, commanding the 1st Cruiser Squadron at Jutland, was killed in action. The letter referred to is in Bacon: *Fisher*, I, 249-50.

³ 'Connie' was Admiral Madden's wife and Lady Jellicoe's sister; 'Pamela' was Fisher's youngest daughter, Mrs. Henry Blackett.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

315: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
June 15th, 1916

My dear Lord Fisher,

Thank you very much for your letter. We had bad luck with the weather and the time of meeting, or we should have done more, but there are several points about the affair that give one food for thought. The inadequacy of the armour protection of our battle cruisers as compared to the German ships is one. ['Never meant to get in enemy's range!' — F.]

However, I hope to get my report away in a day or two now, having just got in all the reports from other ships and bases. But of course the dispatch that is published will be carefully edited by me so that nothing of use to the enemy appears.

The Germans made great use of smoke screens from ships and torpedo craft. ['Why did we not?' — F.] I believe the Inventions Board is working at something in that direction. A good arrangement would be invaluable to me if it can be produced quickly. The use of the smoke balls apparently made the German ships almost invisible to us, whilst they, from their aloft control position, could see us quite plainly. That is the impression many ships have gained.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

316: TO LADY JELlicOE

36, Berkeley Square
June 16th, 1916

Confidential

Beloved Mrs. Jessop,¹

Kindly forgive haste and pencil, as I am very hard-pressed with business. *You are absolutely right in your fears and in your wish for precautions.* I saw the Head Man at 11 p.m. last night (he kindly came to 36, Berkeley Square). He will send a man to your house at Kildary as soon as ever he can select *a good one*. He will write you a letter by

¹ Lady Jellicoe's explanation to me: 'Jessop was the name by which I was known on shore by Lord Fisher's request. He anticipated that the Germans would send an emissary to kill me!!!'

BOARD OF INVENTION...1915-1916

him. You must insist on Jessop falling in with the Head Man's views, as will be expressed in his letter to you, which 'the man' will bring to you. There will be, of course, no expense to you or Jessop in this matter. 'The Head Man' considers it *his official duty* to INSIST on Jessop having the man ALWAYS with him, and it will not be possible for Jessop to prevent the Head Man doing his official duty.

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

I am simply boiling over with rage at the way that a base intrigue is booming Beatty as the sole hero! IT'S MOST ABOMINABLE! And his, Beatty's, speech most vulgar, so I thought!¹ *I hear on ALL SIDES that Jessop was simply NELSONIC in his manœuvres of the Fleet when he touched the enemy! Be sure that no inducement WHATEVER ever persuades Jessop to be tempted to take any other appointment.*

317: FROM VICE-ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

H.M.S. *Lion*
June 16th, 1916

Dear Lord Fisher,

Thank you very much for your kind letter. It is very pleasant to receive the approbation of those who can appreciate. Would that we had been able to make a job of it. To be so near and yet so far was worm and gallwood after the hammering we had given them and the losses we had sustained. But they were not in vain and were justifiable. They suffered far more than we did. To destroy is our only objective.

Yours ever,

David Beatty

¹ To C. P. Scott on June 19th: 'I hope Jellicoe will get the praise he merits, but I doubt it, as he won't blow his own trumpet!' I cannot trace the Beatty speech.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

318: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square
June 18th, 1916

My beloved Jellicoe,

Your letter just come. You will see at A enclosed we are pushing the smoke balls and to-morrow to be tried by Bacon at Dover. I will hustle him.

I hear from an onlooker that your deployment into battle was Nelsonic and inspired, as you could see nothing, and that in consequence you saved Beatty from destruction, and in one hour (*given vision*) you would have ensured Trafalgar. I got this from a most disinterested observer, so *I bless you with all my heart!* He also told me the German calibration wonderful, and I draw the conclusion that no amount of armour will resist such a concentration in salvoes. I warn you therefore against a red herring. Also the zig-zagging of the Germans seems most effective, and (as you say yourself) their smoke arrangements perfect. VON SCHEER WILL SOON BE OUT AGAIN!

I won't bore you with any more, except I can't understand why Tyrwhitt was recalled and why our southern submarines and southern minelayers did not act immediately von Scheer left his base!

Yours,

F.

319: FROM H. W. WILSON¹

203, Elgin Avenue, W.
June 19th, 1916

Dear Lord Fisher,

... Aeons seem to have passed since the day in July, 1914, when Arbuthnot, then with his flag in *Orion*, took me round the fleet in his barge at Spithead, and said to me, 'The modern Navy is Lord Fisher.' Everything there, he said, was of your origination. And now his life has been practically thrown away with nothing gained by such a sacrifice except a magnificent example. There is too much *Revenge*

¹ Wilson, the naval journalist and chief leader writer of the *Daily Mail*, 1898-1938, 'who VIRULENTLY opposed all I did from 1904 to 1910' (Fisher to Lady Jellicoe, June 23rd, 1916, enclosing copies of Arbuthnot's memorandum and Wilson's letter. 'I THINK THIS WOULD INTEREST JESSOP!').

['Sir Richard Grenville' — F.] and too little cunning in the modern Navy.

Probably this will be a lesson; for I cannot go with the eulogists who pretend that all is well when with a crushing superiority in numbers and weight of metal in the line of battle ['We were 2 to 1 in the line of battle' — F.], we managed to engage with a greatly inferior force. Our own estimate of the loss inflicted on the Germans seems to be almost as fabulous as their estimate of loss inflicted on us.

Only a month ago in the Press visit to the shipbuilding yards I saw and admired the wonderful new battle cruisers laid down under your régime and realized perhaps better than I had ever done before what you had accomplished then. ['These are the 5 Fleet Battle Cruisers of 32 knots speed carrying 18-inch and 15-inch guns and only drawing 21 feet of water, so can go into the Baltic through the Sound' — F.] We shall need them now. If we had only played a little cautiously and waited till they were out, it looks to me as though nothing could have saved the enemy from a stunning blow, such as we know you dealt — for you moved the 'Invincibles' — at the Falkland Islands.

That you will return to office I feel certain. The present Admiralty régime is the reign of men of wood. They seem to 'strafe' the people who are keenest and to give insufficient honour to that wonderful improvised navy of fishermen and merchant seamen which has almost equalled the old Navy in its patience and valour. But as a nation we seem positively to love inefficiency.

Yours sincerely,

Hbt. W. Wilson

320: TO LORD DERBY¹

36, Berkeley Square
June 27th, 1916

Private

Lord Fisher presents his compliments to the Director of Recruiting at the War Office and would esteem it a great favour if some consideration could be shown to the greatest living sculptor (at least such is Lord Fisher's humble opinion!), Mr. Jacob Epstein of 20, Great

¹ The seventeenth Earl of Derby, Director-General of Recruiting, 1915-1916. Fisher noted on a copy of the letter: 'In response to a plea from an admirer of Epstein's genius.'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

James Street, Bedford Row, London, who has been summoned for Military Service to present himself at Whitehall in about 10 days' time. He is occupied with the finishing of important work he has in hand (though Lord Fisher don't mean to include a bust of himself in the category).¹ Presumably Mr. Epstein has got to take his turn like all others, only as Lord Fisher has seen a pianoforte workman excused owing to the run on pianofortes (required by the poor), there might be a chance for the first sculptor in the world!

Lord Fisher apologizes for giving trouble and is only sorry he can't offer himself instead of Epstein, as he is doing nothing.

321: TO C. P. SCOTT

36, Berkeley Square
June 27th, 1916

Private

Dear Mr. Scott,

. . . A great many political and Parliamentary friends have lately been to see me to kindly commiserate with me! It really is most amazingly like Job's comforters!!! (But perhaps you don't know about Job!) It's one of the very subtlest things that Satan ever did! Satan said to the Almighty in the 9th verse of the 1st chapter: '*Doth Job fear God for naught?*' It's quite easy to be good when all is good for you! The fine thing is to be content when the d—d things ain't good! I see no likelihood of any change whatever!

Yours,

Fisher

¹ The bust, which was made in a continuous daily series of sittings which lasted a week, depicts Fisher in a favourite expression when things were not going well: lower lip thrust out and face set in a sinister frown. It is in the possession of the Duke of Hamilton, with an Epstein copy of it in the Imperial War Museum. Epstein has written: 'Fisher had an extraordinary appearance. His light eyes, with strange colours, were set in a face like parchment ivory, and his iron grey hair was cut short and bristled on his head. He was short, but had the appearance of combative sturdiness. . . . He talked incessantly ['He monologued continuously and with great animation', Epstein has told the writer] . . . I was impressed by his mental energy and there was a look in his eyes that was dangerous. . . . One morning he came into the room where I worked, filled with sardonic satisfaction. The Battle of Jutland had just been fought. Fisher read out to me "a message from Lord Nelson" on the event which he said he had received. It did not spare the Jacks-in-Office who, he alleged, had allowed the German Fleet to skedaddle back to harbour. . . . In his luncheon talks he would often speak of himself as a poor man. He could have been rich, opportunities were offered to him outside the Navy, but he considered that he had given his life to the Navy, and he was satisfied with that' (*Epstein, an Autobiography* [New York, 1955], pp. 87-8).

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

322: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
July 15th, 1916

My dear Lambert,

It is unquestionably true what you so very kindly write to me, that if the discussion on Tuesday has no reference in it to my part in the Dardanelles operations, the result will be, as you say, that my sacrifice will not only count for nothing and be unrecognized, but that insidiously (as already apparently accepted by Mr. Speaker¹ in a private conversation of his) I shall be handed down to posterity as partly responsible for all that afterwards occurred. Nevertheless, our one object being the ending of the War, it would be calamitous if the astute people really to blame were able to do the 'red herring' by diverting the discussion into any kind of brawl between Winston and myself. Therefore I beg you to be in harmony with Winston as regards anything that may be said. As you say, my letter to the Prime Minister of June 2, if read out, puts the case clearly, but it is a secret document, and must not be so used. I gather that Sir Hedworth Meux and others are banded together to go to any lengths to preclude my return to office, so your remarks anent me will surely be anathematized. He and his political minority are the spokesmen of Masterton-Smith's remarks to you about my not being wanted in office.²

Yours,

Fisher

... Two days ago I had a letter from Hankey: '*Secret*. Your day is soon coming if you will hold your hand.' Read Lovat Fraser in to-day's *Daily Mail*, on Mesopotamia — WHICH CABINET MINISTER [Balfour] PUSHED TOWNSHEND TO BAGHDAD TO COVER GALLIPOLI!³ And the Prime Minister agreed with him, so it may be presumed.

¹ James W. Lowther (afterwards first Viscount Ullswater), Speaker of the House of Commons, 1905-1921.

² In an undated note of about this time to Lambert: 'I think it's a libel about the Fleet not wanting me back. Anyhow it don't agree with the mass of letters I received when I went. . . . POPULARITY is not my idea for gaining the War!'

³ Lovat Fraser, of the Editorial Staff of *The Times*, 1907-1922, had written on 'The Truth about Mesopotamia': 'The Mesopotamian misadventure makes the Crimean scandals of last century seem mild by comparison. . . . Who ordered the advance from Kut to Baghdad? Undoubtedly the Home Government. Why? . . . because the Ministry, realizing that withdrawal from the Dardanelles was inevitable, wished to cloak their failure there by an empty triumph at Baghdad.'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

323: TO C. P. SCOTT

36, Berkeley Square
July 22nd, 1916

My dear Friend,

PLEASE employ all your force to get Loreburn Chairman of Dardanelles Committee. Asquith wants to put on a second-rate ex-soldier, Lord Cheylesmore!¹ There ought to be neither soldier nor sailor on the Committee. They would be partisans. *Common sense is all that is wanted!* Not d—d experts! PUSH THIS.

Yours,

Fisher

Two days ago I had a cheque for £2,000 sent me to write an article against Winston! I returned the cheque within 5 minutes of receipt with a suitable reply!²

Secret. I had a long, secret, solitary talk with John Redmond 2 days ago. He says Asquith is tottering to his fall!

324: TO REAR-ADMIRAL (RET.) SIR SYDNEY
EARDLEY-WILMOT³

36, Berkeley Square
August 14th, 1916

Private and Personal

My dear Wilmot,

Your letter is to the point! On January 7, 1915, at a War Council I most strenuously urged instant action regarding aircraft, so much so I wrote a letter to the First Lord resigning thereon, but was induced to withdraw it on a rotten plea that it was going to be dealt

¹ The first Earl Loreburn, onetime Lord Chancellor (1905-1912); Major-General (ret.) the third Baron Cheylesmore.

² The reply (July 20th), to an A. E. Abrahams, of Earham Grove, Forest Gate, a person of whom the Admiral had never heard, runs as follows: 'I greatly appreciate the value so kindly set on my untried pen by sending me a cheque for £2,000 for articles in a weekly paper, as I've never yet written anything for publication. However, I can't do it, for I follow Job's advice, who truly said, "O that mine enemy would write a book!" My rule of life is "*Never explain!*"' Nevertheless, I thank you and return the cheque herewith.'

³ Eardley-Wilmot, onetime Superintendent of Ordnance Stores (1902-1909), had written Fisher on August 13th, asking him to 'take up the provision of an air fleet. There is going to be a great development of air navigation in the future and all nations will be at it.'

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

with, etc., etc. The pressing danger is to our naval anchorages at Rosyth, Cromarty, and Scapa Flow, where the new 750-foot Zepelins can cruise at inaccessible heights. It takes the best aeroplane an hour to climb up to them and then they are at half speed, as they have to fly at an angle owing to the atmosphere there.

I CAN DO NOTHING! Our ships can't move in the North Sea anywhere without being spotted! Can't you blaze away in *The Times* and *Morning Post*?

SECRET. I was invited to spend a week-end recently with Bonar Law, Carson, and Sir W. Robertson.¹ I talked myself hoarse and walked with Bonar Law and his daughter, but it had no effect.

Yours,

F.

325: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
August 16th, 1916

Secret and Personal

My dear Lambert,

I hear a rumour that Cromer and Co.² have been '*Asquithiated*'!!! They are going to postpone the inquiry to nearer the millennium! If the inquiry went on during the recess, the papers would be full of it daily! *That is to be avoided!* HENCE THE DELAY! The plausible reason for delay is the supposed impossibility of getting the Dardanelles papers properly sorted out and emasculated by the authorities before printing! You are all babes in the wood in the hands of the Prime Minister!

Yours,

F.

Burn this letter.

¹ It was the weekend of July 29th - at Wargrave, in Berkshire, the residence of Sir Edward Goulding, first Baronet (afterwards first Baron Wargrave), Conservative M.P., 1895-1906, 1908-1922, and influential in party circles. Robertson was Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 1915-1918.

² The first Earl Cromer, onetime, in effect, British Viceroy of Egypt (1883-1907), had been appointed Chairman of the Dardanelles Commission. His colleagues were Andrew Fisher, High Commissioner for Australia, 1916-1921, Sir Thomas Mackenzie, High Commissioner for New Zealand, 1912-1920, and three M.P.s: Sir Frederick (afterwards first Baron) Cawley, first Baronet (Liberal), James A. Clyde (afterwards Lord Clyde, a law lord) (Liberal Unionist), and Stephen L. Gwynn (Irish Nationalist). Added later were Walter F. Roch, a Liberal M.P., Admiral of the Fleet Sir William May, Field-Marshal Lord Nicholson, and Lord Justice Pickford (afterwards first Baron Sterndale).

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

326: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
August 18th, 1916

My dear Lambert,

. . . Sir W. Robertson is coming to lunch here alone with me on Monday. I'll see if he will rise to any outside attack being made to help him!

Everyone is running down Winston, nevertheless he has the fighting necessities in him:

COURAGE
AUDACITY
CELERITY
IMAGINATION

Those attributes don't exist in any single one of the 23! Not even in Lloyd George! who always stops at the last fence! My conviction is that Providence will yet come along with a big upheaval! What we really want is universal suffrage. Every man and woman who is not an imbecile should have a vote! Then Kings would be cheap as the fishmongers say of salmon! I think my best plan is to go on the stump for universal suffrage.

HERE AND NOW!

(as the Salvation Army says!) I will write to Kennedy Jones¹ about it. He'll find the money for the tour! as he will see this will turn out Asquith and bring Kennedy Jones in for his nadir.

Yours till a cinder,

Fisher

327: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
August 20th, 1916

My dear Lambert,

. . .
Yours,

F.

¹ At one time closely associated with the Harmsworth Press.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

When Derby, who is a popular fool, tells them 'Victory!' no one will squeak! The German Fleet comes out and sinks two of our good cruisers with submarines.¹ *Where are our 66 submarines!* Where are our minelayers preventing [the German] Fleet going back! But 'don't prescribe till you're called in'. So no use my saying a word till I have POWER!

[Attached newspaper cutting]

Lord Derby, speaking at Southport, said:

'Everyone at the front has absolute confidence in Sir Douglas Haig,² and the authorities share that confidence in Sir Douglas and those fighting under him. There is not the least doubt that the war is turning gradually in our favour, and I have not the least doubt as to the result. Be it short or be it long the result can only be that at which we have aimed from the beginning — a victorious and a conclusive peace.

'Do not be impatient if things do not go as you would like for the moment. It is not merely the taking of a piece of ground here and there. It is more than that. It is part of a general offensive which has relieved the pressure at different points. It is part and parcel of one great enterprise conducted by the different nations but under one carefully thought-out plan, and, believe me, *although it may appear to come somewhat slowly victory is coming absolutely surely, and you may take it from me that those in high authority in the military world are absolutely satisfied with the conduct of affairs.*' [Fisher's italics.]

328: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
August 21st, 1916

Secret and Private

Please burn this letter when read.

My dear Lambert,

Sir William Robertson was very cordial to-day at lunch here. No one else was here. He let fly about the Dardanelles as being '*an insensate affair from beginning to end*', but as he never had anything to

¹ The light cruisers *Nottingham* and *Falmouth* had been torpedoed and sunk, August 19th, in search of the High Sea Fleet, which had ventured out.

² General Sir Douglas (afterwards Field-Marshal the first Earl) Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Forces in France and Flanders, 1915-1919.

do with it, I hardly suppose they'll get him in the witness box! (which is a pity!) A high authority on whose word I can absolutely rely told me yesterday that Kitchener kept back all sorts of information he should have given his colleagues (*but that he probably told all to Asquith*), e.g. (and this is very important), that Kitchener (*knowing Birdwood in India as an absolute good man*) telegraphed to him to go and stay with Admiral Carden (then in command) and investigate matters (*Carden having telegraphed optimistically to Admiralty*). Birdwood informed Kitchener that it was a hopeless undertaking, and Kitchener (so says my friend) kept this to himself! So General Birdwood ought to be called by the Committee and asked to state *all he knows*!¹ *And if he visited Admiral Carden before the troops landed! And what he* (Birdwood) *reported as the result of his visit to Carden.* And TO WHOM he reported and EXACTLY WHAT he reported! (This you must keep very secret, because so far as I can gather my friend is the only one who knows of this.) What more reasonable than to call General Birdwood (the Australian hero!), and undoubtedly the only General worth his salt at the Dardanelles?

I had a long visit last night from Winston. He seems very hopeful of his own prospects and Asquith's downfall, and Lloyd George being Prime Minister. He says HE KNOWS that the one thing relied on by the officials in high authority is that the Dardanelles Inquiry will 'fizzle out' as a personal battle between Winston and myself! *And he is determined that no single word shall escape him to my detriment!!!!* He promises to send me his statement for the Committee when he has finished it at Blenheim Palace, where he is now going, so I shall suspend further progress with what I have to say. F. E. Smith is advising Winston in what he writes! Hankey is to be the first witness, and of course all he says will be what Asquith tells him to say, and quite likely my name will never once be mentioned by him (Hankey) or by Asquith when they give evidence, and yet I was assured yesterday (*and Bonar Law said it the other day to his PARTY MEETING*) that I was the cause of the Coalition Government! as the Government could have got over the 'want of shell' scandal, and had got over it.

Yours,

F.

P.S. Burn this letter. . . .

¹ Lieutenant-General Sir William (afterwards Field-Marshal the first Baron) Birdwood, commanding the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, 1914-1918, and Australian Imperial Force, 1915-1920, was called in by the Dardanelles Commission as a witness on March 17th, 1917. Kitchener had been drowned on June 5th, 1916, when the cruiser *Hampshire*, en route to Russia, struck a mine.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

[Attached newspaper cutting]

TO JACKY FISHER.

To lose a man like you, Sir,
Our land can ill afford,
And in our private view, Sir,
You're with inventions — bored!

329: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Knoll House
Studland Bay, Swanage
August 27th, 1916

Private and Secret

My dear Lambert,

Thanks for your letter. I've just got a long letter from Jellicoe reasserting my letters of January 22nd [24th] and January 25th of this year to Asquith as to want of destroyers and corroborating my statement of *January 7th, 1915*, to War Council about Zeppelins, when I wrote to Churchill resigning on the apathy shown THEN in the matter. Jellicoe says, 'If we don't get more destroyers, we shall lose many ships.' Also, 'One Zeppelin is worth a good many light cruisers' — '*they hampered us terribly last week and greatly helped their (German) submarines.*' 'Their submarines are now very formidable. They got the *Falmouth* at 23 knots, zig-zagging every five minutes.' If all the above does not indicate a coming big storm that will sweep the present Admiralty and Balfour into perdition, I know not what else could sweep them into the gutter! Of course Jellicoe does not come out into the open!

Yours till death,

F.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

330: TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

Knoll House
August 30th, 1916

My dear Hankey,

Is your presentment of the Dardanelles case to Lord Cromer's Committee going to be Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark omitted?

Bonar Law in his recent public speech to his party said that Lord Fisher's resignation led to the formation of the Coalition Government! What led to the resignation of Lord Fisher? Was it the Dardanelles or was it not? *If it was*, then how funny if you never mention my name! *especially as being the only dissident from the very outset!*

I just write these lines as they occur to me through hearing from another quarter that my name will not appear in your official statement to Lord Cromer's Committee. I suppose however my letter to the Prime Minister of June 2, 1916, will be put in officially — it was an official letter — and officially acknowledged. I saw in *The Times* that Sir C. Monro¹ had given his evidence before Lord Cromer's Committee, but apparently in secret. Well! '*Truth is great and will prevail.*'

Yours,

Fisher

Postscript. Phillips² has sent me copy of letter to me from Sir S. Eardley-Wilmot. His judgment has never yet failed in the long years I've known him, so I enclose it. In December 1908 I appointed Admiral Bacon to represent the Admiralty in favour of rigid airships, and Lloyd George signed a favouring report which must be in your records. Jellicoe also supporting. Is all that going to be smothered up? 'The Lord God of Recompense will surely requite' is what Jeremiah says in his 51st chapter.

¹ Lieutenant-General Sir (afterwards General, first Baronet) Charles Monro, shortly to become Commander-in-Chief, India (1916-1920), had taken over the command of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force in October 1915, in succession to Sir Ian Hamilton, and effected its withdrawal from Gallipoli.

² J. F. Phillips, Deputy Librarian of the Admiralty, 1908-1931, later Librarian, 1931-1932, who also served as Fisher's secretary at the B.I.R.

[September 1916?]

I did not send you this letter. I thought it too egotistical. But just afterwards I walked with Rosebery and I was convinced by him how futile his, mine, or anyone else's efforts to contend with the absolute dictatorial power possessed and exercised by the Government to repress relentlessly the interference by the Press or the Public or Parliament in the conduct of the War. Evidence of this I have. I wrote to the Prime Minister a few days ago before I left the Admiralty on May 22nd, 1915, that I could guarantee the successful termination of the War if our sea power was actuated as it should be.

36, Berkeley Square
[September 1916]

My beloved Friend,

I was asked yesterday: '*Could I end the War?*' I said: 'YES, BY ONE DECISIVE STROKE!!' '*What's the stroke?*' I was asked! I replied: 'NEVER PRESCRIBE TILL YOU'RE CALLED IN!' But I said this: 'Winston told me, "YOU CAN SEE VISIONS! *That's why you should come back*"'!

Even Jellicoe was against me sending battle cruisers to gobble up von Spee at the Falkland Islands! (All were against me!) *Yes, and all were against me in 1904!* (see Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot's dying letter), when the Navy was turned inside out — *ships, officers, and men.* '*A new Heaven and a new earth!*' 162 ships put on the scrap heap because they could neither fight nor run away! And Mr. Balfour made the speech of his life at Manchester [1905] about this 'courageous stroke of the pen'!

WE NOW WANT ANOTHER COURAGEOUS STROKE! *And the stroke is ready! It's the British Navy waiting to strike! And it would end the War!* Pitt said: '*I walk on impossibilities.*' *This project of mine sounds an impossibility! but so did von Spee's annihilation!* All the old women of both sexes would squirm at it! They equally squirmed when I did away with 19½ million sterling of parasites in ships, officers, and men between 1904 and 1910! They squirmed when, at one big plunge, we introduced the turbine in the *Dreadnought* (the turbine only before having been in a penny steamboat). They squirmed at my introduction of the water-tube boiler, when I put the fire where the water used to be and the water where the fire used to be! And now 82 per cent of the horse-power of the whole world is turbine propulsion

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

actuated by water-tube boilers! They squirmed when I concentrated 88 per cent of the British Fleet in the North Sea, and this concentration was only found out by accident and so published to the ignorant world by Admiral Mahan in an article in the *Scientific American* [December 1907]! And they squirm now when I say at one stroke the War could be ended. IT COULD BE!

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. I said so to Mr. Asquith on May 17th, 1915. Every conceivable blunder has been committed by the Government since the War began till now (AND THE BLUNDERS STILL GO ON!). And the people are still apathetic, the Press is muzzled, and Parliament is servile, and the Tories sold their country by agreeing to a Coalition Government, with the result that they themselves were sold, as they were (*and continue to be*) a helpless minority in the Government, and there is no Parliamentary opposition or criticism of any inefficiency because there is no one to form an alternative Government. Mr. Lloyd George has enumerated the 14 big blunders, and nearly got turned out for it! I will not paint the lily! And the Pharisees said to the blind man who had been cured: '*Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner*'!¹

332: TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

Knoll House
September 1st, 1916

Dear Hankey,

In reply to your letter in which you propose to give only one extract concerning my hostility to the Dardanelles enterprise, do you not think that the following words in the official print of proceedings of War Council should be inserted in your report in justice to me?

'19th Meeting of the War Council, May 14th, 1915.

'Lord Fisher reminded the War Council that he had been no party to the Dardanelles operations. When the matter was

¹ *John ix*, 24.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

first under consideration he had stated his opinion to the Prime Minister at a private interview.'

The reason I abstained from any further pronouncement was stated.

Yours,

Fisher

I note you will kindly testify to accuracy of my statement that I left the Council table with the intention of resigning, but yielded to Kitchener's entreaty to return.

Have you the letter I wrote on January 25th [28th], 1915, to Mr. Asquith, beginning, 'I am giving this note to Colonel Hankey to hand to you', etc., because in it occur these following words: 'At any moment the great crisis may occur in the North Sea, for the German High Sea Fleet may be driven to fight by the German Military Headquarters, as part of some great German military operation.' It looks as if Hindenburg¹ might try such a course now. . . .

333: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Knoll House

September 2nd, 1916

My dear Lambert,

Could you very kindly send me the statements you allude to made by Mr. Holt and Mr. Houston [shipowners] as to amount of mercantile tonnage diverted from our food supply by the Dardanelles expedition. An expert told me at the time that it increased the price of bread by some huge percentage I don't like to name, as all experts are liars — at least Lord Justice Bramwell said so of his brother, who was the greatest expert witness who ever lived, I believe! In May last there were 407 British vessels of war in the Mediterranean doing the dirty work of the French and Italian Fleets, each of them far more powerful than the comparatively young Fleet of the Austrians. These 407 vessels of war involved an unceasing stream of endless mercantile ships to repel them and re-provision them. This is quite apart from the hundreds of merchant vessels employed with these wild-cat expeditions of Mesopotamia and elsewhere.

Yours,

Fisher

...

¹ Field-Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, appointed in August 1916 (-1918) Chief of the German General Staff.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

334: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Board of Invention and Research
September 6th, 1916

My dear Lambert,

. . . A distinguished M.P. telephoned to see me yesterday, having come specially up from the country for the purpose . . . This M.P. told me he had assisted at a séance where the conclusion was reached that ALL would emerge unblemished from the Dardanelles Inquiry with only ONE exception — Lord Fisher! He would be adjudged as solely responsible for the disaster! This is very plausible, though it's comic! The contention is that had I not sat down again at the War Council Table on January 28, 1915, and thus resisted Lord Kitchener's entreaty NOT TO RESIGN, THEN the whole affair would have stopped dead! Collapsed! But it WILL be funny REALLY that the ONE and ONLY man who objected will be blamed! And the ONLY man who really suffered will be punished! Kitchener got the Order of the Garter, Fisher got the Order of the Boot! And I have been asked to preach at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and called a sun-dial by a vituperative woman because she says I am a brazen-faced optimist.

. . .

Yours,

Fisher

335: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

H.M.S. *Iron Duke*
September 18th, 1916

My dear Lord Fisher,

I am afraid I have not written to you lately, but I have had no news to impart. The smoke-screen experiments are in full swing, but it is early yet to say anything definite. Of course funnel smoke is very good indeed at times, but you can't keep it going for long and it naturally has a bad effect on one's own ship.

We don't seem to get on much with rigid airships. I have not heard of one in the air so far. I have an SS [submarine scout airship] with me. She is useful for patrol work and I hope may discover mines. I had a trip in her recently and could see the bottom at five fathoms under favourable conditions.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

I still cry out for destroyers and the Admiralty look on me as a nuisance in that respect, I fear. *Repulse* ought to be with me in a day or two. The poor protection is the failing of all those ships, including our 'Lions', etc., as compared with the Germans, and a lucky hit or two on them means their destruction. But their speed is, of course, an asset. The 'Glorious' class of course won't take on anything big, or rather anything heavy. They will be very useful in their proper role and should cause as much of a stampede amongst German light cruisers as the caterpillars [tanks] have in their trenches ashore.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

336: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Cassiobury Park
Watford, Herts

September 21st, 1916

Burn.

My dear Lambert,

... I had a telephone from Lloyd George two days ago wanting to meet me. I was with him in 45 minutes! I stayed an hour with him, and afterwards saw Derby, Arthur Lee, McKenna, Runciman, and many others. I was asked what I was going to say about the Dardanelles. I replied, '*The truth!*' But all of these interviews ARE FUTILE! Asquith too adroit! Balfour too subtle!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

I'm declining to meet Winston. I think it better not... Sir C. Parsons tells me the speed of the five battle cruisers I built is PRODIGIOUS! HE says 40 shore miles an hour, but that I think is exaggerated.

337: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Cassiobury Park
September 24th, 1916

My beloved Friend,

... What I dread more than this lingering war is an ignoble peace! *What we require is the Russians in Berlin!* (NOT THE ENGLISH! We

should give them gruel and put their feet in hot water!) I agree with Carson! No German in England or any English possession for 20 years. *The German Navy must be abolished, and Heligoland, given up by Salisbury, returned by Hindenburg (the German Cromwell!).*¹

Yours till a cinder,

Fisher

338: TO LORD CROMER

36, Berkeley Square
October 11th, 1916

Dear Lord Cromer,

To-day Sir F. Cawley asked me to reconcile Kitchener's statement of May 14th at the War Council, that the Admiralty proposed the Dardanelles enterprise, with my assertion that he (Kitchener) did it. Please see Question No. 1119. Mr. Churchill is speaking, and Lord Kitchener said to him: '*Could we not, for instance, make a demonstration at the Dardanelles?*'

I repeat that before Kitchener's letter of January 2nd to Mr. Churchill there was no Dardanelles! Mr. Churchill had been rightly wrapped up in the splendid project of the British Army sweeping along the sea in association with the British Fleet. See Mr. Churchill at Question No. 1179:

'The advance of the (British) Army along the coast was *an attractive operation, but we could not get it settled*. Sir John French wanted very much to do it, but it fell through.'

See Lord Fisher, *War Council of January 13th*! Sir John French then present (*3 times he came over about it*): 'Lord Fisher demurred to any attempt to attack Zeebrugge without the co-operation of the British Army along the coast.'

As to the *Elizabeth*, Mr. Churchill is right in saying there was great tension between Kitchener and myself. He came over to the Admiralty, and when I said, '*If the "Elizabeth" didn't leave that night,*

¹ The cession of Heligoland to Germany in 1890 by the Conservative Prime Minister, the third Marquess of Salisbury, in return for certain African concessions, had been a favourite Fisher theme for many years. This interesting note occurs in a Fisher letter of May 30th, 1916: 'Is there any hope of rubbing it in to the Tories that their Archangel, Lord Salisbury, gave away Heligoland to the Germans, and the First Sea Lord (Sir Vesey Hamilton) never knew a word about it. I was with him in the First Sea Lord's room at the Admiralty when he was told of it.'

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

I should!' he got up from the table and he left! and wrote an unpleasant letter about me to the Prime Minister! *Lucky she did leave!!* The German submarine prowling around for a fortnight looking for her (*and neglecting all the other battleships*) blew up her wooden image.

Yours,

Fisher

Mr. Churchill is quite correct. I backed him up till I resigned. *I would do the same again!* He had courage and imagination! *He was a war man!*

If you doubt my dictum that the Cabinet Ministers only were members of the War Council and the rest of us voice-tubes to convey information and advice, ask Hankey to come before you again and state the status! Otherwise the experts would be the Government! Kindly read (herewith) what Mr. Asquith said on November 2nd, 1915, in Parliament:

'It is the duty of the Government — of any Government — to rely very largely upon the advice of its military and naval counsellors; but in the long run, a Government which is worthy of the name, which is adequate in the discharge of the trust which the nation reposes in it, must bring all these things into some kind of proportion one to the other, and sometimes it is not only expedient, but necessary, to run risks and to encounter dangers which pure naval or military policy would warn you against.'

339: TO CECIL V. FISHER

36, Berkeley Square
October 12th, 1916

Dearest Cis,

A line to say I polished off the Dardanelles Committee yesterday. The shorthand writer and the Committee collapsed now and again! I didn't say a single word that I had prepared beforehand! Quite unfit for publication! But I think they enjoyed it! I DID! . . .

Your loving father,

F.

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340: TO JAMES A. CLYDE

36, Berkeley Square
October 12th, 1916

Secret and Private. PLEASE BURN THIS.

Dear Mr. Clyde,

I have not yet received my evidence, but I am impelled to send a few lines on your question to me as to my not expressing my opinion to the War Council on January 28th.

Your question 1530 to Mr. Churchill: 'I understand Lord Fisher was never enthusiastic about the project?' Answer: 'THAT IS SO.' And your three pithy questions, 1537, 1538, 1539. I don't remember how I answered you, but this is what I ought to have said:

'Everyone of them knew' ['of his opinion' — F.].

'I desired no scene.'

'The Prime Minister had decided.'

'When I said at the Council table the Prime Minister knew my opinion, *and he did not tell the Council*, THEN I rose from the table intending to leave the Council and tell the Prime Minister's Secretary of my resignation. Kitchener, sitting next the Prime Minister ['and no doubt primed by him!' — F.], at once got up and followed me,' etc., etc., etc.

Could any words of mine have added to the significance of this episode? *You yourself say* ['to Mr. Churchill in question' — F.], No. 1539: '*It is most extraordinary no one asked him*' [Lord Fisher]. BUT THEY ALL KNEW! WHY SHOULD THEY?

Yours,

Fisher

341: TO WILLIAM M. HUGHES¹

36, Berkeley Square
October 18th, 1916

Dear Mr. Hughes,

Your splendid letter of August 26th has this very moment reached me.

You have my heartfelt prayers in all your 'great endeavour' for the Empire! If you get turned out as I have been, then we can say as those old Romans did outside the City wall:

¹ Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia, 1915-1923.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

'Non fugimus!
Nos fugamur!'
*'We are not deserters!
We are outcasts!'*

Your burning words will do their work whether you are in or out of office, for you possess the germ of war in having 'big conceptions' and making 'quick decisions'! 'Celerity', as Napoleon said, 'is the whole art of war'!

*'Think in oceans!
Shoot at sight!'*

You ask me how the War is going! I don't know! Both sides tell such vast lies! but I think our lies are useless because we have these thousands of Germans still in England and free to spy! Anyhow they ought to be sent to Germany, or they will be let loose when peace comes; possibly if they are out of England they may find it difficult to get back.

Someone asked me many months ago, after the Servian disaster, what was the outstanding fact of the War? I see my reply has been made public (but fortunately without my name). The outstanding fact of the War is that a restaurant train goes from Antwerp via Berlin to Constantinople with unfailing regularity! That means that Germany has all Asia to supply her needs and the Turks are now fighting on Austrian soil [for the Germans]!

God bless you and prosper you!

Yours till Hell freezes,

Fisher

...

342: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

October 24th, 1916

My dear Lambert,

...
Yours,

F.

SECRET. Soveral¹ told me yesterday he had recently participated in a high and mighty dinner (a private party, so don't repeat this

¹ The Marquis de Soveral, onetime Portuguese Minister in London (1891-1895, 1897-1910), and a longtime friend of Fisher.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

story), and the general conversation turned on the sadness of my not being used! There was a silence that followed. In the midst of the silence Rosebery said: 'Mr. Pitt would not have put Nelson on the retired list.' Good old Rosebery! What a pity he has no backbone! But no more has Asquith!

PRIVATE. Postscript. Balfour is asleep, Asquith is week-ending, Lloyd George is scheming, Bonar Law is Asquithiated, the poor are prosperous, the rich are not hungry, so what Jeremiah says is repeated! *Yes! History repeats itself!!*

'A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets (the Press bureau) prophesy falsely (no German destroyers were sunk in the Channel!), and the priests (Balfour and Asquith) bear rule by their means; and the [my] people love to have it so (as they've never been so prosperous in the history of the world!): *AND WHAT WILL YE DO IN THE END THEREOF?*' (There will be an *ignoble peace* and the naval — [?] of 1798 will be repeated!)

Jeremiah, Chap. V, verses 30 and 31.

And what is said, pray, in Chapter VIII and verse 22 of Jeremiah? 'Is there no balm in Gilead? IS THERE NO PHYSICIAN THERE?' YES! *THERE IS!* BUT HE IS NOT GOING TO PRESCRIBE TILL HE IS '*CALLED IN*'. 'CALLED IN!' And what is the sad conclusion in Chapter IX of Jeremiah, verse 1? 'Oh! that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of [the daughter of] my people!'

(Ten thousand killed and wounded to every square mile in France.)

343: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square
October 29th, 1916

My dear Jellicoe,

... You see Hindenburg is given command of the German Fleet. I happen to have kept a copy of my letter to the Prime Minister of January 25 [28th], 1915, where I told him the German Fleet would be ordered out by a German General, like Napoleon ordered out

BOARD OF INVENTION...1915-1916

Villeneuve to Trafalgar prior to Austerlitz. The acquisition of Norway will be the German Austerlitz and I hope your Trafalgar! Hindenburg is going to strangle all idea of our going into the Baltic. This can be done by overrunning Denmark and Norway, and he has 300,000 untouched soldiers for the purpose with reserves. Sir William Robertson lunched with me the other day and I told him this.

I think you had long ago my Baltic print, which was prepared a few weeks after I arrived at Admiralty and given to the Prime Minister on January 25, 1915, when the Dardanelles project was mooted, together with another print about enforcing the blockade. ['No, I never saw it. On receipt of this letter I wrote and told Fisher this, but never got it.' — J. R. J.] Alas! both plans were blasted by the Dardanelles, and I was blasted and I remain blasted! and APATHY, APATHY, APATHY rules at the Admiralty!!! There is no 'PUSH' anywhere!

Yours always,

Fisher

...

344: FROM LORD SYDENHAM¹

101, Onslow Square, S.W.
October 29th, 1916

Private

Dear Lord Fisher,

I have read the papers with the greatest interest and I will return them shortly. They make it clear that you opposed the Dardanelles crime and that the *causa causans* of the whole disaster was Asquith's preferring Churchill's opinion to yours. I trust the Commission will establish that fact. As you say, Birdwood's report to K. [Kitchener] ought to be produced. I do not know what he wrote or telegraphed, but I do know that, when he returned to Egypt, after looking at the coast, he took a most gloomy view of the prospects.

In your note for the Commission you did not mention your experience at Alexandria [1882]. I think I marked nearly every hit on the works that the *Inflexible* made. The shooting was good, considering the light; but it was clear to me from my study on the spot that, with proper works manned by trained gunners, the Fleet must

¹ Formerly Sir George Clarke. The Admiral had not seen eye to eye with him since 1905 or 1906.

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have been driven off. Had I ever been taken into council I could have produced a long chain of evidence from Nelson's day till this proving that the purely naval attack must have failed. I think that, as you said, the Fleet might have got through with a loss of 10 or 12 ships; but it could not have got back.

The Baltic scheme would have been impossible in the early phases of the War, when Germany had plenty of highly trained men. As soon as the German armies were pinned to positions and obliged to shuttle-cock troops between the positions, it became possible from the military point of view, and it would have been a deadly blow.

As I judge the naval aspect of the scheme, if the S. [southern] North Sea had been heavily mined, your great flotilla and the fleet might have got through; but the Germans would have concentrated all their submarines in the Baltic, aided by their Zeppelins, and I think we might have found the position difficult. On the other hand, if we had smashed the German Fleet at the Battle of Jutland, as I think we ought to have done, the Baltic plan must have been a great success.

All such things depend upon the full co-operation of sea, air and land, which we have never had anyone to bring about.

I have thought over what we talked about, and I think it is impossible for me to speak on air questions at this moment. Of course, I may shortly be perfectly free again.

The sort of procedure required might be to move an abstract resolution 'that, for the successful prosecution of the war, it is essential that the work of the Navy, Army and Air Service should be completely co-ordinated', or some formula of that kind. This would enable the whole question to be discussed if there are enough peers to keep up a two-days' debate, which would have to be organized behind the scenes.

Yours ever,

Sydenham

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

345: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
[October 30th, 1916]

SECRET AND PRIVATE

I believe it is true that no German destroyers were sunk in the English Channel.¹

My dear Lambert,

I am bombarding you with letters! But late last night (Sunday) at 9 p.m. came an important man from *The Times* to tell me how appalling now was the loss of mercantile shipping by German submarines, and that the Press Bureau would not allow any remarks thereon, nor even allow publication of totals. Thus he told me the secret Press Bureau orders were:

I. Only to quote on any one day the information given by the Bureau that day.

II. Not to add up at the end of even two days and publish the total.

III. Not to disclose *when, where, or how* the vessels were sunk.

He quoted appalling places where mercantile shipping was being now sunk, but I was not to name them. He said the submarine menace WAS increasing, WOULD increase, and HAD BEEN increasing by leaps and bounds ever since I left, when it had been completely scotched. *But apathy came along! The defensive instead of the offensive was adopted*, and here we are being kicked by German destroyers in the Channel.

Yours,

Fisher

¹ On the night of October 26th-27th a German destroyer raid on the cross-Channel transport service, in the Straits of Dover, had sunk one British destroyer, disabled another, and sunk a number of drifters and an empty transport. Two German destroyers were supposed to have been mined, but in fact the German flotillas had returned to their bases without loss.

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346: TO THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON¹

36, Berkeley Square
October 31st, 1916

Dear Mr. Dean,

I'm Lord Fisher. Kindly forgive my intruding on your time — I don't know anyone else to write to about it. *Probably you think in Hebrew!* So what edition of the Bible contains the last of the 'Preparatory Sentences' in our Communion Service (Psalm 41)? These are the words and they are better than any other translation (so I think) because of the 'spirit' in them: 'Blessed be the man that "provideth" for the sick and needy: the Lord shall deliver him in the time of trouble.'

I think it's rather nice the Great Atheist saying he didn't know if the Bible was 'inspired', but he was quite sure the 40 unknown men who brought out the revision of the Great English Bible of King Henry VIIIth were inspired because of the matchless beauty of phrase which makes that particular edition of the Bible a great miracle! *I think the Prayer Book's psalms come from that edition!* I think it's often called 'Cromwell's Bible'! Cromwell being Henry VIIIth's Lord Chancellor, I think, and he and Archbishop Cranmer selected those 40 holy men, *whose names appear to be unknown to this day!*

Perhaps you'll also tell me what Bible has in the 13th Chapter of 2nd Corinthians, Verse 14, which ends our morning Service — I have asked 3 Bishops in vain! — 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the "*Fellowship*" of the Holy Ghost be with us all evermore. Amen.'

Also the first portion of the 'Comfortable words' in our Communion Service? *What Bible has them?* In a very old Prayer book I have, it is written 'travel', not 'travail'. Note! We 'travel' through life. We don't 'travail' (as if we were going to have a baby!), and it gives the right idea of life being 'a journey' where we can't 'rest' but only ask to be 'refreshed'.

Perhaps you'll come to lunch here next time you're in London! . . .

Yours till the Angels smile on us,

Fisher

I think my printed 'apologia' enclosed will interest you! Yes!

¹ Robinson, Dean of Wells, 1911-1933, onetime Dean of Westminster (1902-1911), and a great Hebrew scholar. Fisher noted on a copy of this letter: 'He might have lived in A.D. 800, when Westminster Abbey was built. He is tall, thin, ascetic, long-haired, and heavenly-minded!'

Moses prepared his people 40 years for the war in the Promised Land, but he didn't go over Jordan! 'though his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated'. *N.B.* Perhaps I've spoken 'unadvisedly with my lips' like Moses, and [am] punished accordingly. ['I might have said here, "Sir Bertrand Dawson took my blood pressure last night — *it registered an age of 30 years!*"' — F.]

Postscript. Kindly note that the Priest and the Levite 'considered' the wounded man (who fell among thieves), but it was the Good Samaritan who 'provided' for him! That's why the version of the Bible I ask you for appeals to me!

347: FROM THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON

The Deanery
Wells, Somerset

All Saints' Day [November 1st], 1916

My dear Lord Fisher,

'Man is the only animal that can ask a question': and a great man is known by his questions. Yours are not easy to answer; but, rather than delay, I will say what I can, and if I gain more knowledge you shall have it.

First, a word as to the Bibles.

1525. Tyndale — New Testament.

1535. Coverdale — Whole Bible — made use of Tyndale.

1541 (*All Saints Day*) — 'A Bible of the largest volume to be set up in every parish church [Henry VIII].' This was a revision by Coverdale of his earlier work. It is known as the '*Great Bible*'. It was begun to be printed in Paris under Cromwell's patronage; but Cromwell lost his head in 1540. (He had got himself made Dean of Wells, though a layman: no doubt because he wanted this beautiful house!)

1568. The Bishop's Bible: a revision chiefly by bishops.

1611. K. James's — the 'Authorized' Version.

I can't find your 40 inspired and unknown men! I am sorry to rob you of so beautiful a legend.

Now for the problems:

(1) '*Provideth for.*' Our P. B. Psalter [Prayer Book Psalms] comes from the Great Bible (in one of its modified forms). There, as in the

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

Authorized and Revised Versions, we have 'considereth'. The Offertory Sentences [in the Communion Service] only partially follow the Great Bible. This very practical rendering [of 'provideth'] must have been made by Cranmer, or some unknown 'inspired' for the first English Communion Service — that which was embodied in Edward VIth's First Prayer Book in 1549.

(2) '*The Comfortable Words*' also vary from the Great Bible in part. The spelling *travel* is found in the 1549 Prayer Book, but the more correct *travayl* in the second Prayer Book of 1552. Oddly enough, *travel* got back in 1661. But people chose their own forms of spelling with some freedom in those days.

(3) '*Fellowship*' [in the Blessing at the end of the morning and evening Service] comes from Tyndale and Coverdale. It is much better than 'communion' here. It means the true sense of membership produced by the One Spirit of the One Body. It is this lack of fellowship which is the deepest failure of the English Church to-day. What we have to repent of is our *Unconscious Unbrotherliness*. Comradeship among communicants is my watchword for the National Mission. If we got that, as the Early Church had it, we could redeem England.

It has been a pleasure to see your handwriting again, and it is very good of you to take me so far into your confidence. I shall certainly try to come to lunch with you again. . . .

Yours most sincerely,

J. Armitage Robinson

348: TO THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON

36, Berkeley Square
November 2nd, 1916

Dear Mr. Dean,

You are kind!

You SHAN'T rob me of the '*so beautiful a legend*' of '*the 40 inspired and unknown men*'! who, when the English language was at its maximum, made the English translation have the Heavenly meaning far more than the original Hebrew did! A friend stole from me how I got it! I have written for it! May I trespass once more on your kindness? Sternhold & Hopkins's *Whole Book of Psalms, Collected into English*

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

Metre and CONFERRED *with the Hebrew* has in the title page — *James V. Verse 13*: 'If any be afflicted let him pray; and if any be merry, let him sing Psalms.'

Colossians III, 16. 'Let the Word of God dwell *plenteously* in you, in all wisdom, teaching and *exhorting* one another in Psalms, Hymns and spiritual songs.'

'Singing unto the Lord with Grace in your Hearts.'

What Bible, please, the above?

It beats A.D. 1611 hollow!!

Yours gratefully,

Fisher

349: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

Board of Invention and Research
[ca. November 2nd, 1916]

My beloved Friend,

If the submarine menace is not immediately faced, it will compel through food an ignoble peace! *I've dreamt that!* I could deal with it effectively, *I know it*, but I must have POWER. No advisory d—d rot for me!

Yours,

F.

... P.S. It will, as Rosebery tells me, be criminal and fatal to remove Jellicoe to First Sea Lord, as now being talked of at the Admiralty.

350: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Board of Invention and Research
November 2nd, 1916

Private

Dear Lambert,

I've just put my clothes on by accident inside out! Surely that portends something! Yes, it does! A bombshell has been dropped, as I told you.¹ Now I think is a time to strike. Some influential man

¹ See above, p. 381, n.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

like Carson must send to Balfour notice of a question to-day whether any German bodies or German wreckage have been picked up to substantiate his 'idea' that two German destroyers were sunk by mines!! and have not most of the English bodies been picked up? And then ask as a second question: Has the INCREASING German submarine menace shown any signs of decrease? *Is it not increasing?* The fact is it has been continually neglected, and will shortly COMPEL AN IGNOBLE PEACE. It can be dealt with, but not by the bloody fools and Philosophic Doubters now in charge of the sea war! . . .

Yours,

F.

351: FROM THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON

The Deanery
Wells, Somerset
November 3rd, 1916

My dear Lord Fisher,

I send the best answer Wells can provide. I can't find the 'Great Bible', but I have found a *Coverdale* of 1535 (a modern reprint). Here we read:

'Let the words of Christ dwell in you plenteously in all wyszdome. Teach and exhorte youre awne selves with psalmes and ymnes, and spirituall songes which have favoure with them, synginge in youre hertes to the LORDE.'

This is the *basis* of the form you give. No doubt, for the 'Great Bible' Coverdale mended it. The first *complete* edition of Sternhold & Hopkins was bound up with the Prayer Book in 1562. So doubtless the quotation in the title page was from the 'Great Bible'.

When you come and pay us a visit, I will show you our Stone Pulpit in the Nave, which has on it: 'Be *fervent* in season and out of season' (instead of 'Be *instant*', etc.), from 2 Timothy iv. This again is not directly from Coverdale's Bible, which has: 'Be fervent, be it in season or out of season' — which is excellent English. No doubt the Pulpit, which has the arms of Bishop Knight (1541-1547), got its inscription from the 'Great Bible' (but I cannot verify this here).

BOARD OF INVENTION . . . 1915-1916

When will you come? It would be delightful to have you. You would like to sleep in 'Lord Cromwell's' house!

Yours very sincerely,

J. Armitage Robinson

352: TO THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON

36, Berkeley Square
November 6th, 1916

Dear Mr. Dean,

I so love '*Be Fervent! Be it in season or out of season.*'

The worst of this correspondence is I always ask you another question! You mention a modern reprint of Coverdale of 1535. Would you very kindly instruct someone to send me a postcard with the publisher's name? I beg you not to trouble to write yourself. I've been years trying to get such a reprint, and have advertised to no purpose!

Yes, I would delight to sleep in Cromwell's House, provided you promised to preach again a sermon of yours in the Abbey: '*Nevertheless* at Thy word I will let down the net' was your text! Every human probability was against any fish being caught! '*Nevertheless*', Faith does it! (I just love the '*Nevertheless*' of the text you chose.)

But I'm busy now! As Rhodes said:

'So much to do
So little done!'

for the end [of the war] is yet far off!

There is apathy because the poor are rich and the rich are not yet hungry. They soon will be if the German submarine menace is not promptly dealt with.

Yours,

Fisher

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

353: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
November 11th, 1916

My dear Lambert,

Perhaps you were at the Guildhall Banquet [November 9th], but if you were not, I had a great surprise. I was quite taken aback! They began cheering and clapping in the corridors outside! However, the mob is fickle. We know that of old! To-day, '*hosanna*'! To-morrow, '*crucify*'! However, what I am writing to tell you is that though I was behind in the crowd, Asquith made a 'beeline' for me, and shook me most cordially by the hand, *and held my hand* while he told me how he had enjoyed my Dardanelles evidence, etc. Mrs. Asquith cut me dead.¹

Yours always,

Fisher

354: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
November 16th, 1916

Private

My dear Lambert,

I'm so sorry to hear of your cold!

I got an urgent telephone to meet McKenna yesterday. He says that Balfour is on his last legs this week! I DON'T BELIEVE IT! McKenna makes out that Asquith very cordial towards me, but he can't force me on Balfour. Macnamara told a big lie in spirit, though not in words, last night. 'How much tonnage has been sunk in the last few months by German submarines?' THAT is the question! NOT the percentage from the beginning of the War till September last. What has that got to do with the present menace? I

¹ Attached press cuttings contained such statements as: 'Undoubtedly the feature of the announcements of the guests was the great ovation accorded to Lord Fisher. He was visibly touched by the warmth of his welcome.' 'Mr. Balfour and Mr. Asquith were well received, but no reception surpassed that given to Lord Fisher, who immediately entered into an animated conversation with Lord French.' 'Nobody, not even the Allied ambassadors, got nearly as enthusiastic a greeting as "Jacky" . . . Lord Fisher seems to have found the elixir of life. . . . There is certainly nothing in his looks or virile bearing to make him seem the 75 years he is.'

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

was in a taxi with Lord Derby this morning and gave him a frightening, and he has gone off to Lloyd George! *But nothing, as you say, comes of these things!*

How very strange of the Dardanelles Commission that Birdwood has not been made to produce his official telegram to Kitchener after his visit to Carden before anything was done?

Yours,

F.

355: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
November 20th, 1916

SECRET

My dear Lambert,

Lord Ranksborough rushed in here last night full of '*a move being on*'! But neither he or anyone else recognize the strength of the 'Siamese Twins'! and Bonar Law's servile acquiescence and obsequious support!... The 'Secret Session' will play into Asquith's hands, and give Balfour another opportunity to flay Winston alive and to 'fool' the House! But the main thing is that I fear it is *too late* to remedy the 18 months' apathy of the Admiralty. We are going to lose the War, not win it! The penny egg now costs five pennies in Mount Street here round the corner! Runciman himself says all food is 78% dearer. Presently there will be nothing to buy, and then there will be a compulsory, ignoble peace. The belly comes before patriotism. You can't resist starvation.

Yours,

F.

356: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square
November 20th, 1916

Private

My beloved Jellicoe,

Yours of November 17 just came.¹ I enclose you a typewritten 'rumour' just sent me by someone in a reliable position at the

¹ 'I heard from Jellicoe last night -- very pessimistic as to German submarines' (Fisher to Lambert, November 21st, 1916).

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

Admiralty!¹ I know nothing of any such movement, but it is part and parcel of the efforts of the Beresford gang to get you away from command of the Fleet!

The Dardanelles Secretary [E. Grimwood Mears] was with me yesterday and I think I had better not send you any more papers about my *tria juncta in uno* project, which I think Sir W. Robertson greatly favours as likely to finish the War. *They won't finish it on the present line!*

I had arranged to say the following 17 words in the House of Lords, but McKenna entreated me not to do so, as it would have had (so he said) disastrous effects on our Allies,² who apparently we are deceiving as to the seriousness of the German submarine menace. This was my proposed speech: 'If the German submarine menace is not promptly dealt with, we shall *very shortly* have a COMPULSORY, IGNOBLE peace.' I know what is now doing is totally inadequate to deal with the German submarine menace.

I PRAY you not to be cajoled into giving up the command of the Grand Fleet. NO ONE IS FIT TO LICK YOUR BOOTS!! IF YOU LEAVE, YOU'LL BETRAY YOUR COUNTRY! I think Madden ought to succeed Oliver [as Chief of the Admiralty War Staff]. Oliver is tired out and played out. *Time is passing*. Again we shall have 'TOO LATE'!!!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

357: TO REGINALD MCKENNA (?)

[ca. November 20th, 1916]

My beloved Friend,

As Jellicoe's letter is marked 'PRIVATE' and underlined four times, I don't think you should quote it as having read it, but I suggest your saying these words to Bonar Law, AND GIVE IT TO HIM IN WRITING (AFTER *talking to him*), and HIS will THEN be the responsibility,

¹ The statement read: 'The latest rumour: that at the end of this month Sir J. Jellicoe will become 1st S. L., Sir H. B. J. [Jackson] will succeed you at B. I. R., and that you will take up the position of "Adviser" now occupied by Sir A. K. W. [Wilson]', on which Fisher noted: 'The POINT of this is to get a billet for Jackson!'

² McKenna's note to Fisher (November 8th) read: 'Please make no such speech. Think how it would read in every country, allied, neutral or enemy.' Lord Lambert commented some years later: 'If Lord Fisher had not been dissuaded by Mr. McKenna from making that speech, it is more than probable that Lord Fisher would have been backed by Lord Northcliffe as First Sea Lord. The date was just before the fall of the Asquith Government, and Northcliffe was all-powerful then.'

as being able to avert disaster by his resignation from the Government!

'*Balfour ruined his Party.* HE WILL RUIN HIS COUNTRY! It *may be* it is too late to retrieve his 18 months' apathy! Nevertheless, no effort should be spared, and B.M.G.!¹ For so long as he is head of Admiralty there will be apathy! If Sir John Jellicoe is asked the question, "Is the submarine menace being *now* energetically dealt with?" he can only answer "*NO.*" If he is asked, "Can it be adequately dealt with now?" he will reply "*YES.*" If he is asked, "Will it be so dealt with?" he will answer "*NO.*" If you ask Lord Fisher the same three questions, you will get the same three answers. I put this before you in writing on my own responsibility and with absolute certainty of its truth, and I leave you with the responsibility, AS YOU ABSOLUTELY ALONE can change the face of affairs of saving this country from a rapidly approaching compulsory, ignoble peace! A most eminent expert in the House of Lords now uses these words: "We are heading for failure if not disaster, and unless a considerable number of people are cleared out, I see no hope." I know for a fact that you and you alone can now save the Country. I will give you chapter and verse now in confidence. I have no axe to grind. The 2½% mercantile shipping loss is the biggest *suggestio falsi* and *suppressio veri* ever made by a pompous pedagogue!

Yours,

F.

358: TO THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON

36, Berkeley Square
November 20th, 1916

Dear Mr. Dean,

Let me fire one more broadside about these Bibles! 'The 1568, or Bishop's Bible'! Are the names known of the Holy Company that Archbishop Parker gathered round him in A.D. 1563 to execute the revision of the Great Bible of A.D. 1539? Or would these be the 'unknown and inspired holy men' that I mentioned to you? This Bishop's Bible superseded the Great Bible for use in Churches, and I read it was the first 'Authorized Version'. Why is it not more celebrated than any other Bible? The Sunday School teachers dismiss it in a few words! Was not — is not — its English the maximum of

¹ 'B.M.G.' stood for 'Balfour must go'. See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 433, n. 2.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

beauty? I have understood the Authorized Version of A.D. 1611 in its first edition of A.D. 1602 was based on 'the Bishop's Bible'! '*Did these Christians fight?*' There was the Puritan Bible of A.D. 1560 (the Geneva Bible) (*which for 50 years reigned supreme*), so I suppose '*knocked out*' the Bishop's Bible!

Also kindly tell me more than you have done about the Book of Common Prayer A.D. 1549! WHO WROTE THE COLLECTS? (*There came no such prayers ever since!*) I believe Dr. Chalmers said this in alluding to the Collect 'Almighty God, The fountain of all wisdom who knowest our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking', etc., etc.! (*What a hash we make of it now when we modern imitators try to supersede the 'Common Prayer'!!!*)

See the old Prayer Book Collect 'In Time of War and Tumults'!

'Abate their pride
Assuage their malice
Confound their devices
that we being armed with Thy defence . . .'

Is not this like Gideon? It's splendid! One more question: Must there not be a missing Chapter in the Bible on 'Hope'? We have the *Hebrews*, 11th Chapter, on Faith. We have St. Paul's 13 chapter of *Corinthians* on Charity, and what a splendid Collect on Charity!! (*Quinquagesima.*) The planet Neptune was thus discovered! Leverrier and Professor Adams found something missing in the Heavenly System, so they kept on looking till they found it! So let us look for the Holy Chapter on Hope! That is The Great Name, '*The God of all Hope!*'

Yours,

Fisher

359: FROM THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON

The Deanery
Wells, Somerset
November 21st, 1916

My dear Lord Fisher,

I thought, when this battle began, of firing my heaviest piece at once. And here it goes at last. I am sending the most authoritative account I know of the English Bibles.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

As to the Collects, Cranmer is the great man. He wrote them, mostly out of Latin, into English. Some few he made himself. In another book which I am sending, you will find a short chapter on them (p. 119), which will tell you quickly just what you want. Please let me have the books again: but there is no hurry.

This in haste to catch the post.

Yours most sincerely,

J. Armitage Robinson

360: TO THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON

36, Berkeley Square
November 22nd, 1916

Dear Mr. Dean,

I am devouring the two books you so kindly sent me, and will return them to-morrow in separate envelopes by letter post. I have ordered myself copies of them, so won't linger to return yours.

Fancy Cranmer, the Archbishop, and Cromwell, the Secretary of State, both having their heads cut off after such splendid endeavours to unsheathe 'the sword of the spirit'! And Coverdale, the Bishop of Exeter, dying in want and penury, deprived of his Bishopric and afterwards forced to give up even the small benefice he afterwards obtained! And we read, 'Every congregation in the land was offering its praises to God in words that had taken shape under the plastic moulding of his [Coverdale's] hands'! (So says your book!)

These 3 men in a worse plight than Moses! who anyhow 'saw' the Promised Land, but they had no idea what would be the fruits of their holy labours! Two of them [Cranmer, Cromwell] beheaded and the other [Coverdale] starved! And Tyndale, the great originator, strangled and burnt at the stake!

Yours,

F.

P.S. I can't make out why those who compiled the Revised Version in 1880-1884 omitted the headings of the chapters of the Authorized Version of A.D. 1611, as they are so expressive in giving the essence — the summing up — the 'Bovril' of the Chapter! Take this very day, November 22, the second lesson, 1st Chapter of *St. James*; this is the heading of the chapter:

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

'We are to rejoice under the Cross
To ask Patience of God
And in our trials not to impute our weakness or sins unto Him
But rather to hearken to "The Word"! to meditate in it, and to
do thereafter
Otherwise men may seem, but never be truly religious.'

To my uneducated taste, Coverdale is even better in his heading of this chapter in the 1535 Bible — he calls the Heading the 'Summe'!

I am going to have this Bible you sent me bound after Hobday's best binding, and your letters bound with it as a memorial of you! I must not trouble you any more!

361: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

[November 24th, 1916]

I saw my friend, who I think you unjustly suppose regards his own interests and those of Asquith before mine! His opinion is that Balfour will stick like a limpet all the more because he [is] now being attacked by Northcliffe. He hears rumours through women that Jellicoe is to be cajoled into Jackson's billet, and Beatty *vice* Jellicoe! (LORD! HELP US!) On the other hand, Burney (a nerveless fool) is named to succeed Jackson (SAID to be recommended by Jellicoe!!). The remaining story last night is that Walter Long succeeds Balfour on the pledge given to Balfour that he will not allow me inside the Admiralty! Lastly, Bonar Law has consented to serve under Lloyd George as Prime Minister, and the *Morning Post* is running Lloyd George as the Saviour of his country and new Leader of the Tories, and Winston returns to the Tory fold!

Yours till Hell freezes!

Fisher

Asquith to be Lord Chancellor!¹

¹ This letter is an excellent illustration of the worth of rumour! Admiral Sir Cecil Burney became Second Sea Lord in the new Board (-August 1917); Long, who had been President of the Local Government Board in the Asquith Coalition Government, became Secretary of State for the Colonies in the Lloyd George Government (-1918), in succession to Bonar Law, who succeeded McKenna as Chancellor of the Exchequer (-1918) and also became a member of the War Cabinet (-1919) and Leader of the House of Commons (-1921); Churchill did not return to the Tory fold until 1924; and Asquith, when Lloyd George took over, became Leader of the Opposition (the non-Coalition Liberals).

36, Berkeley Square
November 28th, 1916

My dear Jellicoe,

Never in my life have I written a letter with deeper reluctance than this. I have been hoping against hope you would have listened to my entreaty not to give up command of the Grand Fleet, more especially *just now* when Hindenburg will overcome all German naval scruples and order out the German Fleet, *as he now has the power to do!* He sent those ten German destroyers lately to Boulogne and Folkestone a few days after the German Emperor gave him authority over the German Fleet, when Naval Officers thought it madness, *and he succeeded!* Just as Napoleon succeeded or as Nelson succeeded, when both were voted mad, and King George made the classic rejoinder to Admiral Sir John Orde that he wished to God Nelson would bite some of his Admirals! You have the absolute unbounded confidence of the whole Grand Fleet and the whole Nation! Your leaving the command of the Grand Fleet at this juncture is absolutely parallel to Nelson coming home to sit on an office stool the week before Trafalgar! *There is no one comparable to you to command the Fleet!* It is absolutely certain also that you never could have chosen Beatty as your successor, and what reply can you have if as First Sea Lord you allowed a man to succeed you that you did not choose? *You knew a better!* ['I recommended Madden as my successor. Beatty had not experience enough and had made many mistakes' — J. R. J.] *but anyhow you never ought to have left!*

It's a political appointment to prop up an administration of naval affairs that has proved itself utterly incapable of recognizing the first principles of sea strategy, which is to keep the enemy busy and not let him keep you busy!

The Admiralty's chief occupation is in telling the Germans if they do it again they'll get an awful hammering! *but they keep on doing it again!*

The Admiralty are trying the Chinese plan, but then the Germans ain't Chinese! And they laugh instead of crying with fright when Mr. Balfour beats his 'tom-tom'! You have agreed with me that the chief danger now threatening us is the German submarine menace. You have agreed with me:

- I. That it has not been dealt with by the Admiralty.
- II. That it is not being now adequately dealt with.
- III. And that it won't be adequately dealt with.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

And you now lend yourself to an effete administration which has brought us to the verge of naval ruin. God grant it is yet not 'too late'! once more; THIS TIME A FINAL 'TOO LATE'! Three men require to be moved 'instanter' who are chiefly responsible, BUT THEY WON'T BE! You will be cajoled again, as you have been *now cajoled*, into permitting a man to succeed you *who is not your choice! It's a civilian choice!* I wrote and told you what should be Madden's post at Admiralty! It is unassailable!

This is the saddest letter of my life.

Yours,

Fisher

363: TO LORD NORTHCLIFFE

36, Berkeley Square
November 28th 1916

Private and Personal

Dear Lord Northcliffe,

This is not going to be an *apologia pro vita sua* after Cardinal Newman! but an episode in the House of Commons last night which I witnessed impels me to bore you with a couple of sheets of notepaper! It would happen to me if I were to speak *as you would want me to do!*

Quite apart from any action of mine, but consequent on the supposed expressed opinion of the Highest One afloat, the Prime Minister was to have been brought to close grips (*so I heard*) over the German submarine menace, but he waved his hand and practically said it was all d—d rot! *and no word more was said!* Do you really believe that even the Angel Gabriel could displace this adroit man (let alone Lord Fisher!) so long as all the poor are rich and the rich are not yet hungry? One look told me the penny egg in the street next this square costs five pennies (if *new*), but presently there won't be any eggs, and then Lord Northcliffe will '*get a move on!*' but not before.

Nelson has been brought home before Trafalgar to sit on an office stool! His successor is a brave man (*so was Cradock!*), but it don't do in battle to get the sun in your eyes! (You really *can't* shoot with the sun in your eyes!) William of Orange *wasn't* brave! He '*turned green*' (so Motley says) when he heard the cannon shot — *but he won battles!*¹

Jellicoe is unable to talk — he can act! He's dumb as 'William

¹ 'You say that William of Orange turned green when he heard cannon but won battles. What battles? He was consistently defeated, except I think at Namur' (Rosebery to Fisher, December 2nd, 1916).

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

the Silent'! Like Moses, he wants an Aaron! It will be said of him (as YOU say of me!!!),

'He became dumb
And opened not his mouth'!

Well! YOU'VE DONE SPLENDIDLY, WITHOUT DOUBT!! I take your abuse in a kindly spirit!

N.B. *The Lord liveth*, etc.

I have not heard of the naval changes beyond rumours! I wrote and told Jellicoe *long since* that if he left the command of the Grand Fleet, *he was a traitor!!!*

Kindly burn this, but I appreciated your last visit, and that is why I write.

Yours,

Fisher

364: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

December 1st, 1916

My dear Lord Fisher,

I am naturally very grieved to have disregarded your advice and, of course, I did not do so without very great consideration. It is *because* I agreed with you that the chief danger now threatening us is the submarine menace that I have left the Fleet to come to the Admiralty. I could do nothing with the Fleet to cope with that menace. I *may* be able to do something at Head Quarters. I may not succeed, but I am here to try. I know of course that all the criticism hitherto aimed at Jackson will now fall on me, but I am prepared to face that in the hope that I may, with the help of those coming with me, be able to cope with the submarines.

I did not know that you held the opinion you have expressed as to the succession to the command, as I recollect the proposal being made, whilst you were 1st Sea Lord, that Beatty should be made 2nd in Command, and he was placed in a more important post than that held by any of his seniors when he was made Vice-Admiral Commanding Battle Cruiser Fleet. Do you remember a letter in which you said, 'We want more Beatty's'??

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

I have not yet taken on, as I have contracted a dose of influenza.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

365: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

36, Berkeley Square
December 1st, 1916

My dear Jellicoe,

Just this moment got your letter, and I am so sorry you are influenza-ed!

I have no doubt I wrote as you mention, but it's one thing to praise a man for a subordinate command but quite another for the chief command. ['He refers to Beatty.' — J. R. J.] You were the sole man for it and had the unbounded confidence of the Fleet and the Nation. Failing you from sickness, there could be no other choice than Madden. ['I agree.' — J. R. J.] I imagine I must have told you this some time or other, for I found it noted the other day in my papers. I yet have a forlorn hope you may go back — sooner or later. Let us hope the German Fleet won't seize the opportunity (*as they should*) to nip out now at once. I ought to add that my opinion anyhow has greatly altered because of Jutland Battle episodes, whatever high opinion I might have previously had.

Yours,

Fisher

You ought to have Peirse as Controller.¹ You know him well.

366: TO A. G. GARDINER²

36, Berkeley Square
December 1st, 1916

Private

My dear Gardiner,

I had the extreme satisfaction yesterday of telling many most distinguished 'Lights of the World' in politics and journalism, and more especially your brother editors, that YOUR article TOOK THE CAKE!! *It was just first-rate!*³

Massingham told me yesterday he had been in the City, and that

¹ Vice-Admiral (afterwards Admiral) Sir Richard Peirse, Naval Member of the Central Committee of the B.I.R., 1916-1918.

² Gardiner, Editor of the *Daily News*, 1902-1919.

³ A *Daily News* leading article of November 30th on 'The Naval Changes' had questioned the wisdom of Jellicoe's transfer 'because of his immense value as Admiralissimo'.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1915-1916

Balfour would be 'swept out', the feeling against him was most intense, and he kindly added it was just as intense and universal for me to succeed him, but the politicians will never have that! So I take no notice.

SECRET. Runciman sent to urge me to say just a few words only in the House of Lords at 4.30 p.m. yesterday, which he was confident would boot out Balfour. But would not everyone have said, 'He wants Balfour's billet!!!' But I *was* told by a sub-editor of *The Times* that if *you* continued against Balfour, out he certainly would go!

I send you a very secret letter I sent to Jellicoe. When he got it he went to bed under an assumed name! (He's in bed still!) Beatty has also gone to bed, and so has the Prime Minister! Sir Douglas Haig is playing golf on the Coombe Links near London, Sir William Robertson is unveiling statues in the West of England somewhere, and old Hindenburg is planning an 'Austerlitz' to stop my Baltic Plan!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

367: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
[early December 1916]

Private

My dear Lambert,

Just got your note as to your raising the 'naval peril' on Tuesday [December 5th]! For myself I think it would be wiser just now to leave matters alone. I fear everyone will be sure that you raise the question at my instigation, and I am anxious to avoid any appearance of personal pique at being manœuvred out by Balfour's appointment of Jellicoe as First Sea Lord! I only saw this very morning a newspaper extract to say it's the smartest exploit ever performed by Balfour to 'DISH' me! *And so it HAS 'dished' me without a doubt whatever!* At the same time, in furtherance of the schemes I hinted to you, I wanted a factory kept from being absorbed by the munitions department, and wrote to the Admiralty, and instantly my wishes were carried out. See enclosed from the new Fourth Sea Lord,¹ who, of

¹ Commodore (afterwards Admiral Sir) Lionel Halsey had just succeeded Captain Cecil F. Lambert as Fourth Sea Lord (-1917).

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course, had to consult Jellicoe. So that I am desirous of avoiding antagonism, which I think would arise by any such debate as you propose to open! Carson is the type of man who would have no hesitation in returning Jellicoe to the Grand Fleet if he felt assured it was the right thing to do. He will soon discover that in the midst of the greatest war at sea ever known, to have the First Sea Lord and the Admiral of the Grand Fleet in deadly opposition is fatal. *Let that work.* My Parliamentary talk could have only the same effect as was produced by Winston shoving me down Balfour's throat. Carson would stick to Jellicoe all the tighter!

Yours,

F.

368: TO C. P. SCOTT

December 3rd, 1916

Dear Mr. Scott,

Your visit cured me! *I'm well!* but I send this line to say that I cannot exaggerate the fearful risk of the conquest of these islands by the removal of Jellicoe — and fancy his getting a written memorandum from Balfour that his successor was not his choice! Is that not enough to damn Balfour irretrievably, and Asquith backed Balfour up. *It's a Court intrigue. 'Kings will be cheap'!* as the fishmonger says of salmon sometimes. In 5 minutes, if I were First Lord, Jellicoe would resume his command and Beatty would succeed Jellicoe — that would put matters right at once. *Lloyd George is the only Prime Minister. I hope he will have the courage to stand out* AND NOT BE CAJOLED INTO ANY COMPROMISE. Show him my letter to Jellicoe.

Yours,

Fisher

369: TO SIR EDWARD GOULDING

December 9th, 1916

My beloved Edward,

I do hope Bonar Law has arranged a good billet for you in this new Government! The retention of Balfour means my professional death.

He will work ruin at the Foreign Office as he did at the Admiralty, and did with his party. *Our naval position NEVER so bad as now!* Ten ships a day has been the average of ships sunk by German submarines. A French battleship this morning sunk off Gibraltar by submarines, a German cruiser in the Atlantic. Jellicoe is commander of a Fleet, not an organizer of victory! *He was incomparable where he was*, but taken away to prop up Balfour! And the Fleet says, 'We all now have cold feet!'¹ And Robert Cecil, a most effete WAR man, in charge of the blockade.² I hear from Philadelphia the blockade is futile. The Yankees are sending copper, etc. in vast quantities to Germany. And Bonar Law and Carson agree to it all!!! And now Jellicoe has left, we may have a defeat at sea, which means the *easy* conquest of these islands by the Germans.

Yours,

F.

370: FROM C. P. SCOTT

15, Nottingham Place, W.
December 9th, 1916

My dear Admiral,

... I did my utmost with Ll. G. in your interest, but of course in making his Ministry he was hard pressed by many claims. The chief reason why I wanted him to be in power was that he might set things right at the Admiralty. If they ask you to attend the War Council, as they very likely will, I hope that by all means you will go. Carson is a dynamic sort of person and you could get things done. Once you got your foot in, you will go further. There may be fresh reconstructions. Anyway, you've got to give all you can to the country. *I know* Ll. G. wants to enlist you. . . .

Yours ever,

C. P. Scott

¹ 'I got a telegram from the Grand Fleet: "*We have all got cold feet*"' (Fisher to McKenna, December 1st, 1916).

² Cecil had become Minister of Blockade in the new Government (-1918), to co-ordinate the various authorities dealing with blockade policy.

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371: TO C. P. SCOTT

December 10th, 1916

My dear Friend,

I sent you a grateful telegram for your valued letter. I'm your facile dupe! *So will accept anything!* I have got a diabolical certainty to annihilate attacks by sea! (JUST COME TO ME!) Ah! IF ONLY I were in power!!! Well! Like Gideon, 'FAINT YET PURSUING.'

Yours,

Fisher

...

372: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
December 11th, 1916

My dear Friend,

A hasty line to say I have not received any invitation to help the new Government to end the War! The influence that keeps Balfour still serving, keeps me still an exile! although eleven years ago he said he was past even peace work! (Our David has not been able to slay this giant!) For I know David is kindly-affectioned towards me! This upas tree flourishes! Balfour ruined his party, he ruined the Navy, and now he'll ruin the Country at the Foreign Office by pandering to Kings — Greek and otherwise. His naval policy, when the Germans kicked his backside, was to put on a bit of tin and tell the Germans that if they kicked his backside again it wouldn't hurt! *Vide* his letters to the Mayors of Yarmouth and Lowestoft! I suppose this will be his foreign policy. The cure will be a revolution and a Labour Government, and '*Kings will be cheap*', like salmon! There's only one method of war! You must be

'Napoleonic in audacity'
'Cromwellian in thoroughness'
'Nelsonic in execution'!

Yours,

F.

Rosebery writes to me [December 2nd]: 'I repeat, and go on repeating, that the Country must be richer in genius than I perceive if it has no use for your genius. Genius is as rare as radium.'

P.S. Total number of ships reported sunk yesterday by German submarines is eight, including the British Transatlantic liner *Caledonia*.

The Germans possess five capitals of our Allies, they will soon possess Salonika and Athens, and the German restaurant car trains run regularly from Antwerp to Constantinople. So Asia supplies Germany with men and matériel for the War. England will lose Egypt and Mesopotamia.

373: TO SIR EDWARD GOULDING

36, Berkeley Square
[December 12th, 1916]

My dear Edward,

Your letter appalls me!! SUCH BASE INGRATITUDE TO LEAVE YOU IN THE LURCH! And as you say, so UTTERLY STUPID of Bonar Law to stick to 'effetes' and 'worn outs'! But I hear it's the King's doing, associated with social drawing-room influence working with him! Remember, Balfour plays the piano and is a 'soul'! ('Souls have no testicles') (*That's copyright!!*) . . .

Secret. George Lambert has refused Lloyd George's offer in Government because I'm left out! I begged him to accept. Lloyd George has written to him the second time now to press him.¹ . . .

F.

¹ Lambert, replaced as Civil Lord of the Admiralty in the May 1915 shake-up, had not held any official post since. He had written Lloyd George on December 11th, upon being offered a post in the new Government, that he would 'willingly' join his administration, but for his 'grave misgiving' over Jellicoe's removal from the Grand Fleet and Beatty's succession. 'Further I regard it as vital that Lord Fisher's unique naval genius should be utilized in actively directing naval affairs at this crisis. Could you assure me as to these points, . . .' The next day, after Lloyd George's second offer, Lambert pressed Fisher's case again. 'Fate has kindled in both you and him the divine spark of genius. Bring him in and I'll serve you in any capacity.' Lord Lambert informed me (February 7th, 1953) that the position he refused was the important one, although not in the Cabinet, of Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Agriculture. In the same letter: 'Mr. L. G. told me *after* they [the Cabinet] would have all resigned if he had appointed him. L. G. himself was sympathetic but was not so strong as he afterwards became.'

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374: TO LADY BEATRICE PRETYMAN¹

36, Berkeley Square
December 14th, 1916

My beloved old Friend,

I must send you one line that you need not answer on your return to our old home at the Admiralty! *What stirring times we had together!* And how I did get hated!!! (I'm hated still, I fear!) I always think of Wilberforce, who freed the slaves, being shown a picture of the Crucifixion, and the old nobleman said to him: '*Mr. Wilberforce! That's the way we treat reformers!*' But it all turned out trumps — the water-tube boiler, the turbine, the first battle cruiser, and so on! And when war was declared on August 4, 1914, there were the fruits of those labours! Alas! I'm not in it now, and yet Sir Bertrand Dawson told me the other day I was younger now than then! But we mustn't hustle Providence. See what a d—d mess Rebecca made of it when she did! . . .

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

375: TO SIR EDWARD GOULDING

Board of Invention and Research
December 20th, 1916

Private and Secret

My beloved Edward,

Having drunk '1874' champagne with Rosebery till midnight and *tête-à-têted* McKenna, who opened all his heart to me, I have now fully unravelled all the base intrigue of Royalty combined with renegades which forced Balfour into the Foreign Office, forced Carson into the Admiralty against his will, and forced me out and knocked you out from being the head of the Central Office. It is all one complete story, and *I believe I know more than you do!* So at any time you like to drop in I'll tell you. *I can't write it!*

Yours for evermore,

Johannes Piscator

¹ She was the wife of Ernest G. Pretymán, onetime Civil Lord of the Admiralty (1900-1903) and Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty (1903-1906), who had just become the new Civil Lord, 1916-1919.

Remind me to tell you of a fierce feeling about Buckingham Palace and Sandringham,¹ and the extreme likelihood of Mr. Andrew Fisher, late Premier of Australia, being our next Prime Minister, with a Labour Government. *Mark my words!* The whole North is for it!

Burn this letter.

376: TO?

36, Berkeley Square
December 22nd, 1916

My beloved Friend,

The full remembrance has now come back to me of the letters you mentioned to me last night as having exemplified to your highly placed friend [Bonar Law] that I was mad! It is one more sad case of how the lack of a sense of humour is a real affliction like gout or neurasthenia. (I beg you to read Sir John Collie's most marvellous article in *The Times* of November 27, 1916.)² Well, this is what happened:

General Botha made a speech extolling Smuts's generalship in East Africa,³ and wishing he could be employed in France! I cut it out and said 'WHY NOT?' and how splendid if old Botha (who I know well) was made Secretary for War! For he also did marvellously in German S.W. Africa, and I believe Bonar Law splendidly pressed for Botha to be made a Field-Marshal, but Kitchener wouldn't have it! Wouldn't it have been lovely? Smuts in France and Botha at War Office! And the Germans so puzzled at their stabbing them in the back instead of attacking them as desired in the front! And walking along the seashore to Antwerp covered by the British Fleet, and landing a million Russians on the Pomeranian Coast (as in the

¹ 'I hear amongst the proletariat is a deep feeling that both Buckingham Palace and Sandringham should long ago have been given up for our wounded and sick heroes when every other crowned head has done so, and all our dukes and others have given up their homes for the purpose. Kings will be cheap soon!' (Fisher to C. P. Scott, December 20th, 1916).

² Lieutenant-Colonel (hon.) Sir John Collie, M.D., had written on 'War-Shaken Men', a plea for special institutions to treat the men who had been discharged from the Army because of neurasthenia and functional nerve disease.

³ Lieutenant-General (hon.) (afterwards Field-Marshal) Jan Christian Smuts, commanding troops in British East Africa, 1916-1917, Minister of Defence, Union of South Africa, 1910-1920, later Prime Minister, 1919-1924; Louis Botha, onetime Commander-in-Chief of the Boer Army in the South African War (1900-1902), first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, 1910-1919, and commander of the Union forces in South-West Africa, 1914-1915.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

time of Frederick the Great), only 82 miles from Berlin! And *infinitely easier* to land a million Russians in Pomerania than half a million of 'Allied Mixture' at Salonika! The Baltic has no terrors for us with our new Satanic measures! No more d—d silly talk now about '*civilized warfare*'! Shall your women be ravished or not? (and deported as slaves *à la* Belgium), which is the sure fate of England if her Fleet should be wrecked! *You've got to get on quick!* You've removed the sure man of victory from the sea! *You'd better push on ashore!* NOW, where we see a German, there we go! But isn't it rather a good dodge to go where the Germans don't expect you? And hit them in the back? Remember, it's *very desirable* to get the *Russians* into Berlin! NOT THE FRENCH OR ENGLISH! You'd get any terms you liked then for peace, including every ton of German shipping, which is what England wants as her share! I believe I sent a 'repeat' of my letter about Smuts and Botha! Very MAD, I admit! *It's the mad things that come off in war!* Napoleonic in audacity, Cromwellian in thoroughness, Nelsonic in execution! Big conceptions and quick decisions! Think in oceans, shoot at sight! *HAVE WE HAD ANY OF THESE THINGS?*

I don't want to blow my own trumpet, but sending Admiral von Spee and all his Fleet to the bottom is the one and only case in this war, as Winston Churchill owned up in a lovely letter! Whatever else he may be, he is, as Rosebery says, '*magnanimous*'! The other letter (*mad!*) I sent your friend was to send every German-born man and woman in this country back to Germany. This would increase our food supply. A German eats twice as much as an Englishman because he bolts his food! I wrote this yesterday to the Food Dictator (Lord Devonport).¹ Probably he'll think me '*mad*' also! (N.B. it's very interesting that the Saviour was voted '*mad*' by His family, and they wanted to lock Him up! '*For they said: He is beside Himself*'! But He never argued and went straight on and did the biggest thing on earth!)

Well! I've written you enough! No matter what may be the cause, I am at present 'knocked out'! and it's just too silly to fuss about it! And let us pray the German submarine menace will be quickly dealt with — the blockade made real — that our paucity of mines may be made good — that our strategy may be more imaginative, our secret intelligence not German, and our construction policy not folly! I am not a deserter — I'm an outcast!

Yours,

Fisher

¹ The first Baron (afterwards first Viscount) Devonport, Food Controller, 1916-1917.

December 24th, 1916

Secret

Dear Mr. Scott,

It grieves me your not being able to come and see Lloyd George as requested by him two days ago, as so important for the Country he should lean on your advice. Nevertheless, the influenza is a subtle danger, because so liable in its after effects to give you pneumonia or pleurisy.

My enemy, I discover with intense astonishment, is Bonar Law!!! He said three days ago that he was convinced I was 'mad'. (I BEG YOU TO KEEP THIS TO YOURSELF!) So I sent my informant the enclosed letter when I had recovered from the stupefaction of his announcement! But I had but little doubt that Bonar Law had to invent an excuse for his 'volte-face' towards me! He found the Court and Walter Long's party of Tories too much for his friendship for me, and as is the way of politicians 'he ratted'!

But don't you bother, please! Let me alone! I give my whole mind and thoughts continuously and persistently every second by day and night to thinking out my schemes! *So I am keeping 'EVER READY'!* So if I am to help, I shall come down like a thousand of bricks!!! If I am not to help — KISMET!

Yours,

Fisher

378: TO ERNEST G. PRETYMAN

36, Berkeley Square
December 27th, 1916

My dear Pretymán,

You've sent me a very charming letter, though I begged you not to trouble yourself to write, but as you have written and said things, I am constrained to reply, lest you should be under false impressions.¹ I have an immense regard for Jellicoe. I made it a bargain with

¹ 'We were great allies in October 1904, when I became First Sea Lord, but he's under a wrong impression as regards my viewing Jellicoe's leaving the Grand Fleet with approval' (Fisher to Lambert, December 30th, 1916).

Winston Churchill, so long ago as the autumn of 1911, that he would appoint Jellicoe as Admiralissimo in case of war in return for my support of Winston Churchill at that most critical period of his career. Winston fulfilled his promise at almost the expense of a mutiny, for all the Admirals afloat threatened to resign because Callaghan was superseded. Callaghan I got where he was — he was a great friend of mine — but Jellicoe was better; and Jellicoe, in spite of mutinous threats, was appointed Admiralissimo on the eve of war. I just mention all this to show what I've done for Jellicoe because I knew him to be a born Commander of a Fleet! Like poets, Fleet Admirals are born, not made! '*Nascitur non fit*'! Jellicoe is incomparable as the Commander of a Fleet, but to prop up Balfour he allowed himself to be cajoled away from his great post of duty. I enclose my letter to him, and I enclose also a most striking letter from his wife. ['I did not send it.' — F.]

I need hardly say how private all this is, but you are so closely associated with all the wonders we effected from October 21, 1904, onwards that I feel bound to take you into my inmost confidence. Jellicoe retorted I had praised Beatty — *so I had!* See my reply thereon. I told the Dardanelles Commission (why they asked me I don't know!) that Jellicoe had all Nelsonic attributes except *one* — he is totally wanting in the great gift of insubordination. Nelson's greatest achievements were all solely due to his disobeying orders! But that's another story, as Mr. Kipling would say. Wait till we meet, and I'll astonish you on this subject! Any bloody fool can obey orders! But it required a Nelson to disobey Sir John Jervis at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, to disregard the order to retire at Copenhagen, to go into the Battle of the Nile by night with no charts against orders, and, to crown all, to enter into the Battle of Trafalgar in a battle formation contrary to all the sea orders of the time! BLESS HIM! Alas! Jellicoe is saturated with discipline! He is THE ONE MAN to command the Fleet, BUT he is not the man to stand up against a pack of lawyers clothed with Cabinet garments, and possessed with tongues that have put them where they are!

David was a d—d fool when he said in the *Psalms*: 'A man full of words shall not prosper on the earth.' *They are the very ones that DO prosper!* For war, my dear Friend, you want a totally different constituted mind to that of a statesman and a politician! Asquith and Balfour are the great exemplars of immense minds being bloody fools! They weighed everything in the balance! Neither of them (when each was a Prime Minister) ever came to a prompt decision!

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I've known them both intimately for 20 years. Each could talk a bird out of a tree!

War is big conceptions and quick decisions. Think in oceans. Shoot at sight! The essence of war is violence. Moderation in war is imbecility. All we have done this war is to imitate the Germans! We have neither been Napoleonic in audacity, nor Cromwellian in thoroughness, nor Nelsonic in execution. Always, always, always 'TOO LATE'!

I could finish this present German submarine menace in a few weeks, but I must have POWER! My plans would be emasculated if I handed them in. I must be able to say to the men I employ: *'If you don't do what I tell you, I'll make your wife a widow and your house a dung-hill!!!'* (and they know I would!) For I have ruined — justly ruined — over a hundred of exemplary duffers! Hence I'm hated! Some are starving now!

Don't prescribe till you're called in! Someone else might put something else in the pill!

Heaven bless you!

When people come and sympathize with me, I always reply, with those old Romans 2,000 years ago expelled:

'Non fugimus
Nos fugamur.'
'We are not deserters.
We are outcasts.'

Yours,

Fisher

CHAPTER II

THE BOARD OF INVENTION AND RESEARCH, 1917-1918

THROUGHOUT 1917 Fisher's supporters — politicians like Lambert (he above all), Rosebery, Churchill, and McKenna, and journalists like C. P. Scott, Donald, and Massingham, supported by letters in the press — continued to work for Fisher's return in an important capacity. They felt that he could bring a new spirit into the war effort, and they could not understand why the Government did not utilize his great talents. Certainly his phenomenal executive capacity and driving power were being lost at the B.I.R. 'A country which in the crisis of its fate can leave a genius as Lord Fisher's unused must be rich indeed. Are we rich enough to do so?' So concluded an article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on January 25th (which Fisher thought had been written by Rosebery). To Lloyd George, on July 29th, Lambert sent a 'frank statement of a friend who has no axe to grind': 'Fisher is the only genius among the whole Naval and Military hierarchy. Without him, you will not achieve success. Make him First Lord of the Admiralty. He can conceive the Strategy. The present men will execute it if *you* back him.'

But the Government would have no part of the old Admiral. The age factor bulked large in the thinking even of those in the Government who were well disposed to Fisher personally. The Admiral pooh-poohed such reasoning: 'The brain, like port wine, gets the better for age!' Actually, he was as fit and ready to serve his country in his seventy-seventh year as Admiral Lord Barham served her as First Lord in 1805, when he was eighty, and this point was reiterated *ad nauseam* by the Fisherites. However, their case was weakened when the Admiral took seriously ill in October: 'I sighted "The Ivory Gates"!' He did not recover for many months, as his convalescence was set back by an attack of influenza at the turn of the year. Nor was his cause helped by his Cassandra-like warnings of the spring that the High Sea Fleet would shortly come out in accordance with an invasion project of Hindenburg. Their failure to materialize tarnished his reputation as a prophet.

Fisher himself continued to hope that a place would be found for him, especially as he was confident that the war would last into 1918.

He had written Lambert (September 3rd, 1916): 'The War will last 42 months. See *Revelations*, Chapter XIII, Verses 4 and 5. . . . Forty and two months from August 4th, 1914, will be February 4th, 1918.' He was confident that he could deal with the U-boat menace, which showed no signs of abating. On January 31st, 1917, he offered to serve under Jellicoe as Third Sea Lord and Controller, an office he had filled with conspicuous success in 1892-1897, for the specific purpose of annihilating that menace. After a fortnight's consideration, Jellicoe turned down the proposal. It was 'the most bitter disappointment!' of Fisher's life. He believed that Jellicoe wanted him, but that the King had blocked the appointment. It is more likely that Jellicoe feared that the Admiralty was not big enough for them both — that Fisher would never be able to play 'second violin'. The old sea-dog never recovered from this blow. An undated note, probably of 1917, reveals his utter despair. 'A *soliloquy*! When you have done your very utmost for your Country, then sit down under the Juniper Tree with Elijah and ask of God that you may die! and exclaim with the deepest humility and unutterable self-degradation and self-effacement: "I am an unprofitable servant"!'.

The 'apathy' and 'want of vision' of the Admiralty, especially as revealed in the absence of an offensive spirit, drove him wild. His ire and disgust were aroused, in particular, by: (1) the fact of the powerful Fleet 'tamely remaining in apathy at the Orkney Islands' while the German Fleet landed an army on Russia's Baltic coast; (2) the inability of the Admiralty to cope with the submarine menace; (3) the blindness of the Admiralty to the 'obvious policy of keeping the Germans busy by unceasing attacks on their coasts, instead of their keeping *us* busy as they do!' He firmly believed that a decisive strategic coup could still be brought off by an amphibious operation in the Baltic. But he was helpless, being powerless, and all he could do was to send the Prime Minister memoranda.

However, a word of explanation is in order regarding Admiralty strategy, without attempting a detailed explanation. As Jellicoe had, when Commander-in-Chief, been acutely aware that he 'could lose the war in an afternoon', so the Admiralty, under Fisher's and Churchill's successors, refused to contemplate seriously offensive operations that carried a big risk to the Grand Fleet. Whether this position was justified is another matter. Certainly Fisher was not the only critic of the Admiralty. We know that during 1917 Beatty and his officers, offensively minded, were equally unhappy with the lack of imagination at Whitehall. 'The feeling of frustration among the

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higher officers of the Grand Fleet mounted until by the end of the year there was a distinctly revolutionary atmosphere at Scapa and Rosyth.¹

The publication of the Dardanelles Commission Report did nothing to improve the Admiral's temper. 'The more I read of the universal malignant attacks on me in the whole Press as the sole person culpable for the Dardanelles, the more I believe in the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. How they will all ask Lazarus in Abraham's bosom for a drink of water, but I intend to reply: "*I'll see you d—d first*"!!!' (Fisher to Lambert, March 12th, 1917). His wretchedness was made complete by 'the antagonism of the Admiralty Departments towards the Board of Invention, not telling us anything' (Fisher to Cecil Fisher, May 4th, 1917).

It was a dismal year for both the Navy and Fisher. '“Melancholy has marked me for her own”!' As a last straw almost, and ending the year on an especially gloomy note, he had a run-in with the New First Lord, Geddes. There was a threat of resignation. 'I am', he wrote to the Secretary of the B.I.R. (December 22nd), 'saturated with the conviction that it would not be consistent with the great position of our three scientific colleagues for them to be relegated into answering the bell of Admiralty subordinates. You and I don't matter.'

There were interludes of calm, relaxation, and happiness, whenever he was able to get away from London. The Admiral had been one of the trustees of the Hamilton estate since the summer of 1915 (ultimately becoming Chairman). In this capacity, as well as that of a dear friend of the Duke and the Duchess, he made increasingly frequent visits to their properties — Dungavel, at Strathaven, Lanarkshire; Hamilton Palace, Hamilton, Lanarkshire; Balcombe, Sussex; Knoll House, Studland Bay, Swanage; and Ferne House, at Donhead, near Salisbury. He was particularly fond of Ferne.

It's 800 feet above the sea [he wrote Cecil Fisher on January 25th, 1918] and *very, very* bracing. Also, I have a telephone in my bedroom, so that I can talk to my Secretary at the Board of Inventions at any moment, also, non-stop trains from Salisbury to London in 1½ hours, so I can get up quickly if wanted. All this quiets my nerves and keeps me happy!

The management of the Hamilton estate property took his mind off the war and absorbed much of his still formidable energy.

¹ Marder: *Portrait of an Admiral*, p. 25.

Fisher's exasperation over the conduct of the naval aspects of the war continued into 1918 and right down to the Armistice. Repeatedly he urged an amphibious strategy directed at Germany's Baltic coast, and as late as Trafalgar Day he expressed the thought that Nelson was turning in his grave at the passive role of the British Fleet. And, of course, he was still eating his heart out at having no part in the war. One result of his disgust with higher authority was a growing radicalism in politics, already clearly marked in 1917: anti-monarchy, pro-Labour Party, etc. Towards the end of the war, he told an old friend that the Labour Party had asked him to become First Lord of the Admiralty if they came to office!¹

Partly to occupy his mind he plunged into the preparation of his 'Meditations', a project that had gathered dust since the start he had made soon after his retirement in 1910. Only one hundred copies were printed (so 'no libel actions!') in January 1919, 'for private circulation only' among his closest friends. The final title was *Some Notes by Lord Fisher for his Friends*. 'I quake to send you one of the hundred copies,' he apologized to Julian Corbett (November 1918), 'as it's so illiterate — not a stop *anywhere*, and *SUCH* sentences! (a mile long), also expletives!' Most of the material in it went into *Memories and Records*, which were published in the autumn of 1919. (A copy of *Some Notes* will be found in the Admiralty Library.)

The sudden and unexpected death of Lady Fisher on July 18th, 1918, was a terrible blow. The postscript to *Some Notes* (pp. i-iii) contains a beautiful and most touching tribute to the woman who, in the first year of her marriage, had vowed that she would 'never rest till I see Jack First Sea Lord of the Admiralty. Never will I stand in his way, even if it means separation for years'. Of her the Admiral now wrote:

And such was Katharine Delves Broughton, for fifty-two years the wife of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, having married him as a young lieutenant without friends or money or prospects, and denied herself all her life long for the sake of her husband and her children — to them she was ever loyal, faithful and steadfast, and to such as contemned them she was a Dragon!

Thereafter he felt more and more 'like a Bedouin Arab — wanting to wander and disliking any one place for long'. The end of the war,

¹ Sir Frederick Ponsonby (Lord Sysonby): *Recollections of Three Reigns* (London, 1951), p. 132.

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and with it the dissolution of the Board of Invention and Research (from January 1st, 1919), encouraged this wanderlust.

379: TO REGINALD MCKENNA

[early January 1917]

ANOTHER proposed speech, more vile than the one you vetoed on November 9th, 1916. Do you veto this one? *R.S.V.P.!*

The First Sea Lord has quite recently made a carefully prepared public statement at the Fishmongers' Hall [January 11th] that the German submarine menace is more serious now, at this moment, than at any previous period of the War. Without doubt he is right. He infers that so far it is not yet being coped with. *It is not!* That is a fact. The Germans state (and it cannot be denied) that they are launching new German submarines three times quicker than we kill theirs! Also they prove that they sink more shipping than we build — over 800 ships have been sunk in the last six months. This is official. Have we built 800? The White Star *Britannic* was 50,000 tons, and so on! What follows? The British Empire and the German submarine cannot co-exist — one or other must shortly be destroyed. This menace which now confronts us requires INSTANT BIGGER ACTION and GIGANTIC PUSH!

THE EMPIRE IS IMPERILLED!

Note: We have it officially that the German military authorities have ordered the release from the Front of all skilled mechanics. These have been sent to the ports where German submarines are being '*built feverishly*', and 300 engines for German submarines have been recently procured from Switzerland! *Are we releasing ship mechanics and getting engines???*

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

380: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
January 6th, 1917

PRIVATE

BURN.

My dear Lambert,

Lord Mersey¹ had asked Carson and Lady Carson to meet me at lunch. They were both very cordial, but Carson clearly gave me to understand that there was no prospect of my advice being sought, as he inferred everyone was in terror of me! He was most kind and appreciative. He is devoted to Jellicoe, and quite right too. So you see what I told you is desirable, namely, *to leave me alone absolutely!* and not trouble any more! You'll only give yourself trouble and be voted a bore! *and do no good!* There was a Mr. George Russell there, who is always writing reminiscences. I met him 30 years ago, when I sat next to Mr. Gladstone at dinner, as I was a sort of celebrity just then, as I was the youngest Captain in the Navy and commanded the biggest ship in the world! Russell was rather sweet when I said 'good-bye' to him. He pressed my hand and said: 'Believe me, more people love you than hate you'! which really was quite a change!!

Yours,

Fisher

Lloyd George has gone to Rome for a conference. 91,000 more British soldiers have been sent to Salonika since Asquith left. The *Evening News* last night gives a wonderful total of tonnage sunk by German submarines in the first five days of January [29 allied and neutral ships, of 68,000 tons]. I will enclose it if I can find it.

381: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
January 8th, 1917

My beloved Friend,

Yesterday morning I heard a most excellent extempore sermon on

¹ The first Viscount Mersey, the well-known judge, who had (1914-1916) presided over the board of the Judicial Committee which heard appeals from the Prize Court.

the text, 'Don't reckon your chickens before they are hatched'. Those were not the exact words — the exact words were: 'Ye know not what shall be on the morrow', *St. James*, Chapter IV, verse 14. We are being told sure and certain victory shortly over the Germans, and yet the German restaurant trains run regularly from Antwerp to Constantinople — the Baghdad railway is pushing on quicker than ever before and nearing completion. Roumania is overrun. Odessa, the German Liverpool, is going to be gobbled up by Hindenburg, and then Salonika, and in the first five days of this year the German submarines sank 68,000 tons of mercantile shipping and recently bagged two French battleships. If all this is gladdening and gives assurance of coming victory, then the parson yesterday was wrong in his eloquent discourse that we are d—d fools to prophesy!

When I got back from this sermon I found a telephone message from Jellicoe asking me to speak to him. I found he was ill in bed with neuritis, so I went to his bedside, his wife saying I must only stay ten minutes, but he made me stay an hour. Having cleared the ground by reiterating to him what a criminal he was to have given up command of the Grand Fleet — all the reasons you know — I abandoned myself to my former close communion with him. He's as deaf as a post, but some man had been putting something into his nose that came out at his ear and he hopes to be better. Poor chap! He was very seedy but indomitable, and I felt I could have made a dozen of him! His one and only terror is the German submarine menace, which, as he truly says, 1½ years' Admiralty apathy has made so prodigious as to be almost beyond cure! But Jellicoe is not Satanic! I told him so! 'Civilized warfare' is a thing of the past. I told them all this when I was a delegate at the First Peace Conference at The Hague, and my remarks were voted as totally unfit for publication, and they weren't!

But why I am writing all this to you is to explain that this 'good Samaritan' visit of mine to Jellicoe (*'pouring oil and wine'*! and I've promised to lunch with him next Friday!) results in my *now* being roped in and made partners now with the unimaginative strategy, ridiculous Admiralty secret intelligence arranged by Germany, and futile shipbuilding, which all perforce goes on, as they don't change the three men responsible! And these leavings and legacy of Mr. Balfour remain triumphant. The why and the wherefore I am unable to disclose to you. (Apparently no one speaks French at the Foreign Office — they all talk German!) There is nothing to be done now but to wait Providence! Kitchener and Asquith left unexpectedly



FISHER IN 1917

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

and Cromer is dying. (He damned me in his Dardanelles Report — now it's his turn!) 'Ye know not what shall be on the morrow.'

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. Carson went up last night to the Grand Fleet to enjoy the Beatific Vision! and the *Queen Elizabeth* has rammed the *Repulse*! and we have recently sent 91,000 more British soldiers to Salonika to be massacred by Hindenburg (making a total of 180,000). And what has Hindenburg got up his sleeve with the German High Sea Fleet — he now commands it absolutely.

382: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELLICOE

36, Berkeley Square
January 9th, 1917

My dear Jellicoe,

The enclosed from America this morning. It is instructive, showing what the President's entourage think of the increasing German submarine menace. To-day's news says artificers are being withdrawn from the German fighting line to push on the 'feverish' building of German submarines. I agree with what you said on Sunday, that the long apathy at Admiralty makes your task (FOR WHICH YOU GAVE UP SO MUCH!) almost hopeless — that is, IF the Germans can turn out more submarines a week than you destroy! (PRIVATE. How is it you hold on to these criminal blunderers at the Admiralty who displayed the apathy?) When Lord Milner¹ came to me in 1915 at the Admiralty, I was able to show him we had 'dished' the German submarine menace. I can't well tell you in a letter what happened after I left. Perhaps you don't know that I'm going to lunch with you on Friday, and would like half an hour after lunch with you undisturbed. Is this possible, *or will you telephone any other previous day or hour, as tempus fugit!* . . .

Yours,

Fisher

¹ The first Viscount Milner, a member of the War Cabinet (December) 1916-1918, without portfolio until April 1918.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

383: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

36, Berkeley Square
January 16th, 1917

Private

My dear Jellicoe,

I'm just off to Cassiobury Park, Watford, Herts — telephone number: *Watford 49* — for about a fortnight, for there seems nothing for me to do in London, except I come up for the day next Thursday at 11 a.m. to 'pow-wow' with my 'Magi' (our weekly meeting!). I think you saw Sir Charles Parsons and Peirse. Parsons is very bloody-minded about Dumas and the question of mines, which really is disastrously bad, I think, both as to quantity and quality and want of 'Abdiels'. But I have endless complaints, so it's no use beginning sore subjects! If you require me at any time, I can be with you in an hour by your telephoning to my Secretary at Victory House (J. F. Phillips, 301 Gerrard, Extension 5). Don't trouble to reply. *I am exceeding anxious about the German submarine menace, and a great effort is imperative!*

I wrote to McKenna (he being on the War Council, and my most intimate friend) on November 8, 1916, proposing to make a short speech *that afternoon* in the House of Lords (I sent him copy of my speech) to say the apathy shown in regard to the German submarine menace would shortly bring about an obligatory, ignoble peace, but he begged and entreated me to desist on patriotic grounds. He said: 'Please make no such speech. *Think* how it would read in every Country, allied, neutral or enemy.' So I unfortunately refrained, or we should certainly have '*booted out*' the culprits *there and then*! They all remain in the present Government, bar Jackson.

I am ready to sweep a crossing, if it will help us in the War! I am not a deserter. I am an outcast!

'Non fugimus!
Nos fugamur!'

Yours,

Fisher

36, Berkeley Square
January 16th, 1917

Secret and Private

My beloved Friend,

. . . On Sunday week I got a telephone from Jellicoe and found him ill in bed. I stayed an hour with him and lunched with him yesterday so I have complied with your wishes. He tells me [that] on Friday last [January 12th] he presented a memorandum to the War Cabinet fully substantiating his recent speech at the Fishmongers', in which he stated with peculiar emphasis that the German submarine menace had never before threatened us so gravely as just now. The expression Jellicoe used to me was that his memorandum made the War Cabinet 'sit up'!

I grieve now [over] your letter to me of November 8, 1916, in which you vetoed my proposed speech in the House of Lords about the German submarine menace . . . Had I made that speech then, I think we might have redeemed the situation. I doubt its being possible now, without a mighty national effort. The Prime Minister has so many irons in the fire that he may fail to realize that this German submarine menace is far more momentous than all else put together.

I. There are over 300 German submarines (*many more, I believe!*).

II. The Germans put forth two to three new German submarines weekly.

III. The German submarines destroy, I believe, on an average some 10,000 tons of mercantile shipping daily.

IV. I believe we are somewhere near a million tons of mercantile shipping deficient through past German submarine action, and Mr. Balfour made no adequate effort to replace it during his 18 months' administration of the Admiralty.

V. If we don't destroy more German submarines weekly than new German submarines launched, also if we don't build more mercantile shipping than is destroyed by them, *then* the end is near!

Many think the position is beyond redemption, but all things are possible in war, and a mighty effort is now vital!

Yours,

Fisher

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918
385: TO LORD NORTHCLIFFE¹

Cassiobury Park
Watford, Herts
January 17th, 1917

Dear Lord Northcliffe,

I've just dictated enclosed *ore rotundo*, as I shall see you to-morrow, I expect, and kindly burn it when read, as it is simply dashed off out of the abundance of the heart. Your H. W. Wilson will put it better, and also Massingham, if only you will see him. . . .

Yours,

Fisher

[Enclosure]

THE VI BIG BALFOURIAN BLUNDERS
or
ADMIRALTY APATHY FOR 18 MONTHS

I. AN UNIMAGINATIVE STRATEGY.

Exempli gratia: Had the plan been carried out as put forward in November, 1914, and so urgently pressed by the Admiralty, and concurred in on three separate occasions by Sir John French at three separate War Councils, culminating in the decision to proceed with the project of the British Army advancing along the Sea Coast of Belgium, supported by the British Fleet, then Antwerp would have been recaptured, the German (submarine) menace would never have existed, and the War would have ended by the turning of the German flank.

In fact the initial error of British strategy was landing the British Expeditionary Force in France instead of at Antwerp.

But, to repeat, if the Admiralty had pressed for the British military advance along the Belgian Coast, Zeebrugge would have fallen, Antwerp would have been ours, and the German submarine menace annihilated.

II. FUTILE FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE.

Exempli gratia: The Naval Intelligence Department of the Admiralty have utterly failed to give notice of the prodigious efforts of Tirpitz,

¹ This letter may have been prompted by a letter from Massingham that day: 'I've seen Northcliffe. He is impressed, and says he's going to publish some facts as to the German building of submarines without submitting them to the censor. And he *may* stir, I will try him again. I think you have the ball at your feet.'

resulting in three hundred to four hundred submarines now beleaguering England.

Three hundred engines for submarines have left Switzerland for Germany, all expert workers on submarines have been withdrawn from the German fighting line to push forward with feverish construction of more German submarines.

Is it conceivable that even Admiralty apathy could have withstood this alarming information, had the Naval Intelligence Department been aware of it?

III. FUTILE ADMIRALTY SHIPBUILDING POLICY.

Exempli gratia: The German submarine menace has always been the only menace. The whole shipbuilding policy should therefore have been concentrated on constructing types of vessels to cope with this menace and in transforming hundreds and hundreds of existing vessels into submarine decoys and anti-submarine raiders. In that direction there has been total Admiralty apathy. The question now is:

TOO LATE?

IV. BLOCKADE INADEQUATE AND FOOLISH.

Exempli gratia: The wit of man can hardly conceive the criminal folly that has permitted Germany to be fed, both in fighting and eating, by food and munitions conveyed through neutral agency.

The remedy was so simple. Had the North Sea been sown thickly with mines, as so urgently pressed in November, 1914, in a printed memorandum, a complete blockade would have been automatic, and the Germans, having initiated the strewing of mines in the North Sea, would have incurred all the odium of sinking neutral shipping. Our answer would always be: 'It was a damned German mine that blew you up'!

V. MINES AND MINELAYERS.

Exempli gratia: When the War started there were only ten thousand inefficient mines and four slow minelayers, with only forty-eight hours' coal capacity.

Unlimited orders were given to make good this awful delinquency, but instead of our now having one hundred thousand mines in store with scores and scores of 'Abdiels' going 34 knots to lay them down, we have one of the latter and only twelve thousand of the former!

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

VI. THE BALTIC PROJECT MEANT VICTORY BY LAND
AND SEA.

It was simply history repeating itself. Frederick the Great, for the only time in his life, was frightened and sent for poison.

Geography has not altered since his time. The Pomeranian Coast has not shifted, and a million Russian soldiers could have been landed within eighty-two miles of Berlin.

It is the Russians we want to enter Berlin, not the French or the English. The unparalleled armada of six hundred and twelve vessels constructed to carry out this decisive act in the decisive theatre of the war were diverted and perverted to the damned Dardanelles.

THESE BLUNDERERS, who are heads of departments, remain in office, honoured, though possibly no longer trusted, but still possessing the power of emasculating all projects by the sure method of delay. 'Too late', they love.

386: FROM LORD NORTHCLIFFE

The Times
January 22nd, 1917

Dear Lord Fisher,

All very interesting, no doubt, but it is your fault that the blunderers remain in office. I knew that your leg would be pulled by McKenna, and it was, and badly.

Yours sincerely,

Northcliffe

387: TO LORD NORTHCLIFFE

Cassiobury Park
January 24th, 1917

Dear Lord Northcliffe,

The broadside you've fired into me about McKenna requires one in return.

You have to remember that had not McKenna stood by me up to the point that twice he walked out of the Cabinet, our Fleet would

not have been what it was when the War broke out, for there was not one Churchillian vessel marshalled under Jellicoe. It was McKenna's administration that the world gazed on at Scapa Flow, and the grandson of one of my greatest friends, a Lieutenant in the German Admiral's Flagship, wrote thereof in terms of unmitigated admiration, and three days after war broke out told his mother (whom I know) that they were paralysed by Jellicoe's Fleet and dumbfounded by the unexpected appointment of Jellicoe as Admiralissimo! That appointment was planned under McKenna and adopted by Churchill and fixed by me in 1905. His recent removal from the command of the Grand Fleet was the biggest naval crime ever perpetrated and on a par with the subtle trick that forced Campbell-Bannerman (whom I knew very intimately) to form his Government [December 1905] before the General Election and so compelled him to include Asquith, Grey, and Haldane in his Government — ALL WHOM HE HATED!

Yours,

Fisher

388: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

41, Cromwell Road, S.W.

January 25th, 1917

My dear Fisher,

Many congratulations on your birthday and on your continued enjoyment of perennial youth and vigour. I was very glad to get your letter. I had heard from my mother of your walk with her.

Like you I have seen no one political. One is quite powerless as far as the war is concerned. It is a pity, because a descent on the German coast, the bringing in of Denmark and the entry and domination of the Baltic would secure a decisive victory for the Allies, who otherwise will be forced to far less satisfactory alternatives after far greater sacrifices. Our common enemies are all powerful to-day, and friendship counts for less than nothing.

I am simply existing.

Yours ever,

W.

P.S. The *Manchester Guardian* has a very nice article about you to-day which you should read.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

389: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Cassiobury Park
January 26th, 1917

Private

My beloved Jellicoe,

McKenna being an attached friend of yours, I think I ought to tell you, in reference to what you said to me yesterday, that when I recently lunched with him, though he spoke very freely about everything, he said not a word of making any such attack as Carson told you, and at the table were many who would be aware of a press campaign such as Carson mentioned to you, but nothing of the sort was said. Of course it don't at all follow that any of them should say anything, though they might have the intention.

Yours,

F.

I hope you don't think I have forgiven you. I have not. You are the only incomparable Leader of the Grand Fleet. That is our sheet anchor. I don't agree with you that the submarine menace is more important than the Grand Fleet. We can deal with the submarine menace, but a disaster to the Grand Fleet would be irreparable, irretrievable, eternal. No man can say what would follow!

If the direction finder can be so effectively used (as stated) by seaplanes to locate submarines, we have a mighty weapon!

I am going next Friday with Sir J. J. Thomson, Sir Charles Parsons, Sir George Beilby, and Peirse, to Harwich to see Professor Bragg and discuss anti-submarine matters there. . . .

390: FROM J. L. GARVIN

9, Greville Place, N.W.
January 26th, 1917

My dear Admiral,

. . . I am to see Carson next Monday afternoon and we will talk gravely over the whole thing. Against Carson there's *nothing* whatever to be done. He supports Jellicoe. Jellicoe can't be attacked. The combination of L. G. and Carson is an indispensable part of the

Parliamentary basis. It does NOT help you that Massingham was a persistent little-navy man and pro-German before the War, and is a pacifist now. Likewise McKenna, much as I like him, much as I wish he had steered differently, is still probably in a state of delusion as to the real feeling of the country. The situation is exactly what the last lot left it, and the country will not bring them back no matter what happens. As you know, my personal wish was that Asquith and McKenna should be associated with the new combination required.

All this means that I and my friends must work through L. G. and Carson, if we can. I think you ought to meet them together and talk frankly to them as you do to me. Carson is NOT ill-disposed towards you — far from it; but the difficulties ingeniously bequeathed to him are awkward in every sense. Jellicoe — there's the crux. He could play a historic part by saying: 'This situation is wrong. Let me go back to my Grand Fleet. Let Lord Fisher take my place here, with power to disregard all Admiralty precedents and to frame a special professional Board with Beattie [*sic*], Bacon and every great technical mind on it. Sir Edward, that's my advice.' . . .

Yours ever and ever,

J. L. G.

391: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Cassiobury Park
January 27th, 1917

My dear Lambert,

I've just had a lovely long telegram from Queen Alexandra wishing 'the great Sea Lord to guide'¹ (I don't know what 'George' would say if he knew!!!)

I lunched with Jellicoe and told him not to fancy I had forgiven him (I HAVE NOT!), and to make sure, I wrote after lunch and reiterated it! C. P. Scott has been down here after breakfasting yesterday with Lloyd George, who, he says, is most cordial but can't do anything! NO ONE CAN. Carson said the same thing to E. Goulding two days ago — also affectionate towards me ('They all love

¹ Queen Alexandra's telegram actually read: 'With all my heart I wish our great Sea Lord joy of his birthday and may his good advice be followed everywhere and bear fruit.'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

Jack'!!!). NO ONE CAN DO ANYTHING! SO LET IT ALL ALONE!! Jellicoe said the German submarine menace was going to be still worse. The organized liars of the Press Bureau hide from the Public by the orders of that blinking rogue at the head of the Naval Intelligence Department [W. R. Hall] what is truth. McKenna certainly was wrong when he entreated me to desist from my speech in the House of Lords. . . .

Yours,

F.

392: TO SIR EDWARD CARSON

36, Berkeley Square
February 1st, 1917

Dear Sir Edward,

I'm sorry to hear you are not well.

I was at Cassiobury, meaning to go on to Worcestershire on pleasure bent, when I received communications of impending agitations from both the Government and Opposition sides, and I went yesterday to see Jellicoe to state I was no party to any of it, nor to those who may have seen you about me. I can take no part in anything that subverts Jellicoe, but I told him to his face yesterday that, had I known 13 years ago that he would have sold me by giving up the Grand Fleet, I never would have had anything to do with him. It's the greatest naval crime ever perpetrated, and, Rosebery said, equivalent to Nelson coming home before Trafalgar. Jellicoe is absolutely incomparable as Leader of the Grand Fleet, as exemplified by the telegram sent when he left: 'We've all got cold feet.' Although I've not forgiven him (*and never will, as I told him yesterday*), yet I've given him a plan for dealing effectively with the German submarine menace. If he don't like it, there's an end of it, and if he don't mention it to you, I hope you won't ask him. Sufficient for me that he don't see his way to work with me.

Don't trouble to answer.

Yours,

Fisher

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

393: TO C. P. SCOTT

February 2nd, 1917

Dear Mr. Scott,

Garvin, having had cordial interview with Carson, entreated me to see Jellicoe. With reluctance I went. I gave him a plan — A D—D GOOD PLAN! He was dumbfounded and dazed. But he won't have it! He's not Satanic — also he sees I should sweep him off his feet! So another chapter is ended! But, by Jove, he got the truth! So I wrote to Carson as enclosed to have it on record. Momentous as the submarine menace is, it pales into insignificance as compared with the command of the Grand Fleet. We have food for 5 months — by that time the Allied armies ought to be on the Rhine! IF EVER! So the submarine can wait. But any moment a disaster to the Grand Fleet means the easy and sure invasion of England and the ravishing of our wives and daughters.

Yours,

Fisher

394: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Victory House
February 7th, 1917

My dear Lambert,

You ARE kind to me! Acting on your advice I declined lunch at McKenna's, but he sent me two violent telephones that it was urgent, so I went and found him 'fuming' over *Morning Post* article of yesterday (a dirty stab in the back!).¹ Of course my everlasting principle during six years of malignity as First Sea Lord was to encase myself in the impenetrable armour of contempt and fortitude, looking forward to the 56th verse of the 51st of *Jeremiah* coming true!² AND SO I LEFT MCKENNA! But not without meeting an American lady

¹ The *Morning Post* had published a leader about Fisher entitled 'An Effect of Nerves'. It disparaged the suggestion that he be appointed to head an Anti-Submarine Warfare Department at the Admiralty. The Admiral was 'neither a man of science nor an inventor'; he had had no direct wartime experience with the German Navy; and 'his return to the Admiralty would instantly arouse distrust and animosity throughout the Service. . . . It must be a grave reason indeed that justifies suggestions to place this man or that man in a position of responsibility. In this case there can be no such reason. There is no evidence whatever that the Admiralty are not doing everything that can be done to deal with submarine piracy . . . the Navy has done and is doing incomparably well.'

² *Jeremiah* li, 56: ' . . . For the Lord God of recompenses shall surely requite.'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

with whom I've 'exchanged hearts'! So delightful! And I believe rich! She is a widow — a Mrs. Leeds of 41, Grosvenor Square, and they told me some King wanted to marry her! I don't wonder! Anyhow, we are going together to Palm Beach in Florida, so *au revoir*.

Yours till death,

F.

395: FROM ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE¹

February 13th, 1917

My dear Lord Fisher,

I have thought a great deal over the suggestion which you made to me during your visit, but I have been forced to the conclusion that it would not be practicable for such a scheme to be adopted.

There are only two posts which, in my opinion, you could hold here — those of First Lord or First Sea Lord. In any other position, I cannot help feeling that difficulties are bound to arise.

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. Jellicoe

¹ Some of the background of this letter is contained in this extract from the Crease MS. (Crease was called in by Jellicoe for advice shortly before this date.) 'Sir John Jellicoe told me that great pressure was being brought on Mr. Lloyd George and the Government to find a position on the Board of Admiralty for Lord Fisher. The First Lord (Sir E. Carson) and he were both doubtful whether Lord Fisher's age and physical condition made it advisable or even practicable to do this, quite apart from various other difficulties connected with his rank and position. The post of Controller would in any case seem to be the only possible one. He said he wanted my opinion about this, because he had to breakfast with Mr. Lloyd George the next morning, when the matter was to be discussed and decided.' Crease replied that when he had seen Fisher last, in June 1916 (Crease had then left the B.I.R. for the Ministry of Munitions), Fisher had been 'as alert mentally as ever he was, but naturally he was not so strong physically . . . if Lord Fisher could become Controller, with someone to do all the detail work . . . leaving him to evolve the big ideas and generally hustle the work and keep things moving, it would be an admirable arrangement'. Jellicoe said that Crease had confirmed what Vice-Admiral Peirse and others had told him. To Crease's suggestion that Fisher's real place was as a member or naval associate of the supreme body, the War Committee, Jellicoe 'replied that this was another possibility that he had in mind, but he feared the politicians were dead against anything of the sort and it was hopeless to propose it. He would, however, first tackle Mr. Lloyd George on these lines and see what happened.' Obviously, nothing happened.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

396: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicOE

36, Berkeley Square
February 14th, 1917

My dear Jellicoe,

Just received your note, and I am much grieved you are unable to adopt my suggestion made to you this day a fortnight, for I am confident it would have been a success.

Yours,

Fisher

397: TO THE DUCHESS OF HAMILTON

[mid-February 1917?]

Garvin's letter corroborates Goulding's statement told him by Carson's personal friend that Jellicoe *solely and alone* (*no doubt swayed by the King*) objected to my reasonable and practicable offer to serve as Controller of the Navy in this great crisis of the German submarine menace. Lloyd George on February 5 (6 days after I had made my offer to Jellicoe) went at 6 p.m. to see Carson to beg him to have me back at the Admiralty, and Carson told Lloyd George that Jellicoe objected and he (Carson) would therefore resign sooner than agree. Goulding was told of this the very night it all occurred. So *finis* Jellicoe!

398: to?

[mid-February 1917?]

WAR INCAPACITY

We have now a mass of 'Directors', and all connected with 'Starvation'! A Food Director, a Shipping Director, and so forth—a mob of them! What has caused the necessity for these business men? The answer is unanswerable! The sole reason is the utter want of foresight, during the last 18 months of Admiralty administration, to anticipate the present German submarine menace!

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

First and foremost comes the total ineptitude of the Admiralty Intelligence Department, which is run by a peculiarly incompetent crank — nearly a lunatic — who has proved himself singularly incapable of gauging foreign intelligence, otherwise it is impossible to conceive that the German Admiralty would have been permitted to amass these hundreds of submarines they now possess without steps being taken to provide the antidote. But this man (Captain Hall) still remains at the Admiralty as Director of Naval Intelligence, hoodwinking the Press, and 'blinking' them at his weekly levée of journalists. He ought to go — the sooner the better!

II. Surely our Admiralty building policy during the last 18 months should have been directed solely to deal with submarine warfare, as it was most clearly recognized that this alone constituted the one and only menace that had to be dealt with by us at sea. The man responsible for this Department still remains at the Admiralty, the Third Sea Lord — Admiral Tudor. *He ought to go!* and the sooner the better!

III. The strategy at sea has been faulty and only now, after 'long last', has a minefield in the North Sea been proceeded with. The man responsible for this is Admiral Oliver, and he could have forced the other two previously mentioned to do their business, but he failed. *HE ought to go!* and the sooner the better.

But it will be said: Why does not Admiral Jellicoe remove them? He could do so! Well! *HE'S KIND!* He'll promote them in time, and so get rid of them. Failure the road to honour! *But time is vital!* and a 'gentle shove' is urgently required *now!* Read Mr. Lynch's speech in the House of Commons, pages 378 and 379 of Hansard (12 February 1917)¹ (*un-answered, and unreported by any newspaper*) to learn the truth about the War. If he lies, why not brand Mr. Lynch as a liar! We have been muzzled, and so we shall be starved!

It was long ago reported in the foreign newspapers that all experts had been withdrawn from the German fighting line to build German submarines with 'feverish' haste, and 300 engines for German submarines were made in Switzerland. *We took no notice!* with the result that the Germans have over 300 submarines at sea

¹ Arthur Lynch, Nationalist M.P., 1909-1918, had made such remarks as these on pages 378-9: 'If it has taken General Haig twelve months to advance eight or ten miles with the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of men, how long . . . will it take them to reach Berlin? . . . At the beginning of the War the Navy was in a much higher degree of efficiency than the Army . . . but are you content even with the Navy to-day, not judging by the difficulties, but by the results?' He dwelt on the submarine peril and continued: ' . . . the Navy has been deluded by the same fault as has deluded the Government — its desire to play a safe game and not to face responsibility.'

and launch 3 new ones a week. *We certainly don't kill 3 a week!* and we are only just becoming alive to the gigantic effort instantly required to replace the mercantile shipping sunk by the German submarines!

But read Mr. Lynch's speech. If it is untrue, why is it not answered? Why is it suppressed in the newspapers?

What sort of patriot is the Member of Parliament who condones this traitorous suppression of the truth?

P.S. Where is the German raider? He was last in South America. If he is cunning, he will go to the Bay of Bengal and paralyse the Indian trade!

399: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
February 17th, 1917

My dear Lambert,

Queen Alexandra is enthusiastic over your speech in House of Commons [which] she sent me to-day, full of your praises! So I expect to see you soon as a Court sycophant! She is equally indignant with Meux.¹ She is still lovely, and she don't paint, and her smile sweeter than ever! I told her all she had to do was just to smile! SHE IS SWEET! . . .

You read Jellicoe's letter to me declining my offer to be Controller of the Navy. After that there remains no hope, so far as I can judge! I believe lies will be told about the German submarines being destroyed in large quantities, but if we keep on losing ships by submarines without diminution, the Public soon will detect the lie!!

Meux's '*apple of discord*' is *solely* that the Engineer Officers of the

¹ Admiral of the Fleet Hedworth Meux, addressing his constituents at Portsmouth on February 16th, said with reference to Lambert's statement in Parliament on the 15th about the submarine menace being in hand when Fisher was in office: 'The submarine menace was never well in hand in the early days of the war. Lord Fisher was in command at that time. He is a man who always throws an apple of discord into the Naval service. It is said that if Lord Fisher had been consulted the Dardanelles expedition would never have taken place. A man in Lord Fisher's position had only to say "I will not allow this" if he wanted to stop that expedition. He could have done it by threatening to resign. It is said he is not liked in the Navy because of his methods. I consider it would be an absolute disaster to the Navy if Lord Fisher were brought back. I know what the feeling of the Grand Fleet is. It is also said that Lord Fisher is not popular with society ladies and is not a gentleman. Lord Fisher was born a gentleman. Why people dislike him in society is because he goes about boasting of the number of officers he has ruined. Unless these things are said intrigue will continue to centre about Lord Fisher's name, and he must not come back.' (As reported in the *Daily Mail*, February 17th, 1917.)

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Navy were done simple justice to! The 'blue blood' rebelled against the engineer being equalized with the executive branch of the Navy.

Yours in haste,

F.

400: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

February 18th, 1917

My dear Lambert,

In case I don't get you on the telephone this morning, I write to say that Ivor Herbert¹ came to see me last night and praised your speech, which he said he cheered while others looked 'glum' at you!

Hedworth Meux says I was at Admiralty when the three cruisers, *Hogue*, *Cressy*, and *Aboukir*, were sunk. I WAS NOT! But directly I returned to Admiralty I took steps to deal with those responsible, and two of them (Admirals H. H. Campbell and Christian) being the King's favourites, I incurred venom! It's a dirty story those two Admirals not being out with their Squadron when the three cruisers were sunk. I believe Campbell was staying with the King at Buckingham Palace at the time, on the plea his ship was *hors de combat*! Why didn't he hoist his flag in one of the three cruisers that did go out? according to the custom of the Service that an Admiral never leaves his squadron. As to the *Formidable*, mentioned also by Hedworth Meux, the Admiral in command (Bayly) was promptly superseded without benefit of court-martial. A court-martial always whitewashes a high officer and puts the blame on the Admiralty! *Vide* [the *Goeben*] court-martial on Admiral Troubridge. Like the Irish, a court-martial is always 'agin the Government'! There's a big trade union in the Navy, and I got up against it by getting rid of 19½ millions sterling of parasites, animate and inanimate! *Hinc illae lachrymae!* (Hence these tears!)²

Many journalists endeavoured to interview me yesterday! I saw not one! Had I done so, I would have said: 'Sir, do you think I should ever have received the Order of Merit had I not been persistently maligned?'

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Major-General (ret.) Sir Ivor Herbert, first Baronet (afterwards first Baron Treowen), Liberal M.P., 1906-1917.

² This refers to Fisher's dockyard economies during his first tenure as First Sea Lord and to the fact that Hedworth Meux represented a dockyard constituency.

36, Berkeley Square
February 19th, 1917

My dear Crease,

Kindly confirm, with reference to our conversation the other day, whether the following statement correctly represents what occurred:

I. *Lord Fisher leaving London on May 22nd, 1915.*

Captain Crease was sent for by Mr. McKenna (Chancellor of the Exchequer) to the Treasury in the forenoon of Saturday, May 22nd, and told to tell Lord Fisher he had best get away at once from London, and accordingly in about 20 minutes Lord Fisher packed up and only just caught the train to Glasgow at Euston (*the last train that day*). But having some qualms about leaving without Mr Asquith's knowledge and sanction (Mr. Asquith having written to Lord Fisher to reserve his resignation in view of Mr. Asquith forming a new Government), Lord Fisher requested Captain Crease to get Mr. Asquith's acquiescence and telegraph to him to some station on the line to Glasgow, so that if any error in Lord Fisher's going to Scotland, he could return. Lord Fisher got a telegram from Captain Crease en route to say Mr. Asquith approved. This approval was conveyed to Captain Crease through Captain Hankey direct from Mr. Asquith. At 7 p.m. that same Saturday evening, Mr. Asquith wrote 4 lines to Lord Fisher informing him that his resignation was accepted.

II. *Incident of the proposed telegram by Mr. Churchill, written by him on Friday night, May 14, 1915, which led to Lord Fisher's resignation.*

Somewhere about midnight, Captain Crease, on Friday night, May 14, sent Lord Fisher from Mr. Churchill an extensive proposed accession from Home sources of vessels and material to the strength of the Dardanelles Naval Force. Lord Fisher was unable to acquiesce and resigned thereon. Lord Fisher simply stated to the Prime Minister his inability to continue as First Sea Lord.

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Crease had rejoined the Admiralty a week before, for duty on committee work (-May 1917).

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402: FROM CAPTAIN THOMAS E. CREASE

Admiralty, Whitehall
February 20th, 1917

Dear Lord Fisher,

In reply to your letter, the facts are materially as you state. So far as my recollection goes, the following minor alterations are required:

- I. (a) I think you sent me over to see Mr. McKenna on the morning of 22nd May, to show him some letter and to tell him how the newspaper people were continually bothering you. He did not send for me.
- (b) I do not think I actually sent a telegram to you, but I cannot be certain. I believe you arranged that I should do so if I did not catch you at Euston with the reply of the Prime Minister sent through Colonel Hankey, but I did catch you at Euston, and I think you definitely had the sanction of Mr. Asquith before you left London.
- II. I cannot be positive that Bartolomé did not take Mr. Churchill's proposed instruction (about sending further vessels to Dardanelles) to you himself late on the night of 14th May. I saw it late that night, and I remarked to Masterton-Smith and Bartolomé that you would certainly resign if it was sent to you. It was never in my possession, and the Private Office must have sent it direct to you somehow, after I saw it.

I remain, Yours sincerely,

Thomas E. Crease

403: TO C. P. SCOTT

36, Berkeley Square
February 23rd, 1917

Secret

Dear Mr. Scott,

I sent you a telegram in reply to your letter, fixing 3 p.m., Monday next, to see you here. I HAVE MUCH TO SAY TO YOU! VITAL! It is sufficient to say *now* to you that I have it from Jellicoe's own lips,

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confirming Carson's words in his Navy Estimates speech, '*that the German submarine menace is grave, serious, AND HAS NOT YET BEEN SOLVED!*' And it is very stupid indeed of Jellicoe and Carson (both of them) to decline my offer to deal with it by way of occupying a quite subordinate position *under them both* at the Admiralty, *as I offered to do on January 31st*, but which offer was declined by letter to me from Jellicoe on February 14th last.

SECRET. Carson on February 5th (or thereabouts) telling Lloyd George, who begged him to have me back, he would sooner resign than have me at the Admiralty! They BOTH (Jellicoe and Carson) turn and rend me because of a malignant Higher Influence! '*Kings will be cheap*' after this war! *Have no doubt of this!* For a General Election in May certainly will mean a Labour Cabinet!

This German submarine menace requires a most gigantic push, both IMMEDIATE and VERY DRASTIC! That gigantic push is now totally wanting! *There is neither imagination nor audacity! Both are vital necessities!* But FAR EXCEEDING the German submarine menace is the possibility of *another German* 'AUSTERLITZ' shortly on the banks of the Thames, if any disaster occurs to the Grand Fleet owing to Jellicoe's weak abdication of its supreme command!

Yours,

Fisher

N.B. Hindenburg will shortly order out the German High Sea Fleet to fight its supreme battle with our Grand Fleet in co-ordination with his military necessities! *Vide* Napoleon, Trafalgar, and Austerlitz!

404: TO A. G. GARDINER

Board of Invention and Research
February 28th, 1917

Secret. PLEASE BURN.

My dear Gardiner,

As just promised on the telephone, I tell you as follows, but it's deadly secret:

On January 31 I made my proposal to Jellicoe to deal with the German submarine menace, and when I had finished, he said, 'How wonderful! I told the King exactly what you have now offered, and

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he said it was exactly THE place for you to fill' (as much as to say it had been vetoed by the King!). On the following Monday, February 5, Lloyd George sees Carson and entreats him to have me back at Admiralty. Carson says Jellicoe won't agree, and if Lloyd George insisted, he, Carson, must resign. Evidently Jellicoe overawed by the King! So Lloyd George had to give in, as otherwise those Tories would have seceded who back Carson. But Jellicoe does not write to me till February 14 to decline my offer (as if he had had another try!).

I enclose an admirable article in *Manchester Guardian*.¹ I tried to get C. P. Scott to let out who wrote it. It's perfectly true and admirable. I suppose I must be 'quite alive' or they wouldn't get into such a frantic state at the bare idea of my coming back! . . .

Yours,

F.

405: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
March 4th, 1917

My dear Lambert,

. . . I lunched with McKenna by request and found Masterton-Smith. Both said Jellicoe feeling greatly my coldness towards him, and entreated me to see him, as Lady Jellicoe had been here to call and he afraid (so they said), so I went, but both not at home, so I wrote my name in their book *very large indeed!*

McKenna had secretly seen Dardanelles Report.² I'm the only one blamed. Winston whitewashed, and Asquith gets something. McKenna wildly indignant about it, but apparently no redress. Roch has written a memorandum, but all the others have signed. *It is still kept secret. Such is life!* The one who objected and was kicked out the only one blamed! Well! It's no use worrying! And I have

¹ 'Victory House. Where Lord Fisher Is Wasted', from a Naval Correspondent, *Manchester Guardian*, February 19th, 1917. The main points made were that 'the greater part of his wonderful energy is thus running to waste', and that the office of Controller should be revived, with Fisher appointed to it.

² The interim report of the Dardanelles Commission, dealing with the origin and inception of the attack, was issued on March 8th. A second and final report (in which Fisher did not figure) was published later in the year, dealing with the military operations themselves down through the evacuation.

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the blessing of marvellous health given me, and my eye is not dim nor my natural force abated (*Deuteronomy*, Chap. 34, verse 7).

Yours,

F.

406: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Cassiobury Park
March 10th, 1917

My dear Lambert,

... I'm glad to be here, free from newspaper interviewers and condolers! The *Daily Mail* says I must never be employed again, and calls me Sancho Panza, so my career ended, I suppose! 'WAIT AND SEE'! Northcliffe has fixed on Carson as his new Prime Minister, judging from Northcliffe's effusive praise of Carson at Aldwych [Club] meeting [March 8th], and Carson says to Northcliffe: 'Smash Fisher or he'll smash me'! For the German submarine menace is not being gigantically dealt with, and so it will not be put down!

I'm going to Harwich with the Magi next Saturday to see our two big [anti-submarine] antidotes practically worked, *so I shall then be on the war path!!!!* All the panel at the Chemist's Shop loved me yesterday, so I'm all right, I think. The Dardanelles evidence must be published verbatim. *See page 24. Fisher is right!*¹

Yours till a cinder,

Fisher

407: TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JELlicoe

Cassiobury Park
March 12th, 1917

Private

My dear Jellicoe,

I went specially to Glasgow to hustle these gunboats and see them packed in pieces and sent off! *They were a wonder!* and I do hope old

¹ The Admiral presumably meant page 44, not 24, of the *Dardanelles Commission. First Report*, which was a minute by Andrew Fisher, dissenting 'in the strongest terms' from certain of the Majority Report conclusions. See above, p. 50.

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Yarrow¹ will receive commendation and a G.C.M.G. or something of the kind. A word from you will do it, and I know you appreciate him. I'm a 'back number', so no use to him!

Yours,

Fisher

How interesting that I'm made the 'scapegoat' of the politicians over the Dardanelles! as if every one of them did not know of my determined hostility, but I hung on so as to get those 612 vessels of sorts built, with the hope of withdrawing the ships before any men were landed. Cromer did not put in the enclosed print, as he ought to have done. May the Lord have mercy on him! *I wouldn't!* If only the evidence is published verbatim, it will be just lovely! . . .

408: TO DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

36, Berkeley Square
[ca. March 14th, 1917]

My dear Prime Minister,

My decided and considered opinion is that the invasion of these Islands is now, at the present moment, a far greater menace than starvation from the German submarines, because

- I. Sir John Jellicoe is no longer in command of the Grand Fleet.
- II. The immense production of German 'long-distance' submarines renders now feasible what was formerly impossible re invasion.

That the German High Sea Fleet will shortly attack the British Grand Fleet in furtherance of Hindenburg's expressed views in regard to England admits of but little doubt. There is indeed, just now, every reason for it. Certainly it may lead to a Trafalgar for England, but it gives the war chance of a German Austerlitz on the banks of the Thames, while the Battle of Trafalgar is proceeding off Jutland or further north. Germany, I am assured, has never had so many troops as at the present moment, and 40 per cent of the whole

¹ Sir Alfred Yarrow, first Baronet, had built the gunboats which had played an important role in the British capture of Baghdad on March 11th.

mercantile high-speed steamers is in the North Sea, instantly kept ready for transporting half a million German soldiers to the Thames before the Grand Fleet from its Trafalgar off the Scaw could prevent it — for our military force in England is admittedly totally inadequate at the present moment to resist such a German landing, and masses of German submarines render the operation feasible.

I say, most emphatically and decidedly, that Sir John Jellicoe should instantly resume the command of the Grand Fleet, for it will be bad enough if we have a Trafalgar, but if we don't, then indeed the War is over! This is no aspersion on Admiral Beatty, and he could most admirably succeed Sir John Jellicoe as First Sea Lord, but Sir John Jellicoe, as stated in my enclosed letter to Sir E. Carson, is incomparably our best Admiral for command at sea, and he justly possesses the unbounded and even affectionate confidence of the Grand Fleet. For 13 years he has been prepared for Admiralissimo. No consideration whatever should prevent Sir John Jellicoe's immediate return to the command of the Grand Fleet. An 'Austerlitz' on the banks of the Thames would end the War! The German submarine menace won't! (that is, if properly dealt with).

I feel compelled to give you, as Prime Minister, my decided and considered opinion. I have not been wrong hitherto. For example, I append my printed statement on the submarine menace 6 months before the War, when our Admirals at sea were calling them 'playthings'!

Please remember Austerlitz immediately followed Trafalgar. Trafalgar did not stop Austerlitz! And Pitt said, notwithstanding Trafalgar: 'Roll up the map of Europe', and he died of a broken heart! You are a second Pitt! I pray you won't have a second Austerlitz.

Yours,

Fisher

I entreat you to read the enclosed correspondence. We have already, at my Board of Invention and Research, two great *anti-submarine* devices of mighty promise if promptly applied on the required gigantic scale. The reason of the rage against me is my purpose has been to make the Navy democratic, and therefore more efficient. (See paper marked 'A'.)

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409: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

March 18th, 1917

Private

My dear Lambert,

I had a great day at Harwich yesterday! Our submarine finder was a great success! But the biggest success I saw yesterday was the type of submarine I got from America, built in 5 months, and crossed the Atlantic from America to the Dardanelles and arrived there as fresh as paint! They hold the field now! They are never sick or sorry — the young submarine men are enthusiastic over them! (THIS IS A WAR OF THE YOUNG MEN!!) But shall I be ever praised for this big plunge I made with Schwab, who had never made a submarine in his life before? NO D—D FEAR!!! *War consists in risks and plunges!* I went a trip in the derided motor boat, and she also first class, but of course when the d—d fools tried to use this motor boat as a first [fast?] cruiser, it didn't come off! So consequently in the same way Beresford and Co. are crabbing the 'Courageous' class, because they ain't battleships but only the fastest things on earth! Really, life is sickening!

The tonnage sunk by submarines is being suppressed! You MUST insist on having it produced SINCE they last gave the tonnage! DON'T FAIL. The submarine menace is unabated! . . .

Secret and Private. The German submarine minelayers are magnificent! They continuously lay mines a few miles outside Harwich Harbour. If the German submarines come out of THEIR holes and lay mines outside OUR holes, why can't we steer the same course back and lay mines off THEIR holes? The official excuse now is that our submarines are prevented by mines from approaching the German Fleet! RUBBISH!!!

Yours,

F.

410: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

March 19th, 1917

My dear Lambert,

Rosebery writes me this morning from Bath *opposite to what you say!* He says: 'The Dardanelles Commission seems to be determined to make you the scapegoat!' I fear that his version is true. I read

yesterday a letter from an M.P. that the general opinion of the House of Commons was dead against me. This morning a letter to me from a great man says: 'Time is on your side.' Yes! So is the Day of Judgment! But the War will be over by that time, and had not the Dardanelles Committee damned me, I might yet have had a 'look in'! . . .

Yours till a cinder,

F.

SECRET. Loreburn came to see me this morning, very sympathetic. This is my speech for the House of Lords, as he suggests. *Keep it private*, and don't tell Loreburn, as his visit was *à la* Nicodemus!

411: TO DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

36, Berkeley Square
March 20th, 1917

My dear Prime Minister,

I got your message last night that you contemplated calling me before the War Cabinet to be questioned about my letter to you in regard to Jellicoe resuming the command of the Grand Fleet, and the possibilities of invasion (*formerly improbabilities*) due to the prodigious increase in German submarines.

Of course I shall always do my best to attend to your wishes, but my letter to you was in the way of a personal appeal and not worded for production at a Council table! Nor can I see any advantage in meeting such a body of persons because it is so purely a matter of opinion and not of argument! *It's the impossible that happens in war!* as I point out in my enclosed letter to Sir John Jellicoe dated November 28 last year — 4 months ago! (It's rather curious the day after writing to you that the Military Correspondent of *The Times* should make the allusion he does in the enclosed extract to invasion being likely!)¹

But do you think it's desirable to discuss Jellicoe's qualities before the War Council? Nor do I desire to disparage Beatty. Jellicoe wrote to me how I had praised Beatty! *So I did and so I do!* But that is not the point. The point is the Grand Fleet is the vital force on which our

¹ Colonel Repington had, in *The Times* of March 15th, mentioned invasion as 'among the various possibilities' of enemy action.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

existence depends, and not on the subjugation of the submarine menace. I should like to tell you what Count Yamamoto, the Japanese Minister of Marine, said to me about Togo's appointment. It is peculiarly appropriate to Jellicoe.¹

Then as to the application of the mass of German submarines now existent. You will never get any two experts to agree as to how Hindenburg will act! See my reference to Hindenburg in my enclosed letter to Jellicoe. At your meeting I shall swear one thing and all the others another — but it will only be opinions! I was right six months before the War about the submarine, and *everyone else* was wrong. It was precisely the same about the turbine, the water-tube boiler, and aircraft, and the types of fighting ships, etc. I was usually in a minority of one! *So probably I shall be now!*

Yours truly,

Fisher

412: FROM ADMIRAL (RET.) SIR ALGERNON DE
HORSEY²

Melcombe House
Cowes

March 23rd, 1917

My dear Fisher,

A line or two to express my admiration of your brief speech in the House of Lords.

In my opinion it was just exactly what was required to put an end to a rancorous, foolish and impolitic discussion, which can only tend to lower us in the estimation of our enemies. Your brief speech was just that of a distinguished sailor and peer. I was also proud to learn that you, after your long service, had volunteered to command the Dardanelles expedition.

With kind regards, Yours sincerely,

Algernon de Horsey

¹ See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 136-7.

² De Horsey was the oldest living admiral in the Royal Navy. Fisher had, on March 21st, made this brief statement in the House of Lords apropos of the recently published Dardanelles Report: 'With your Lordships' permission, I desire to make a personal statement. When our country is in great jeopardy, as she now is, it is not the time to tarnish great reputations, to asperse the dead, and to discover our supposed weaknesses to the enemy; so I shall not discuss the Dardanelles Reports — I shall await the end of the war, when all the truth can be made known.' Among other congratulatory letters on Fisher's speech in the Lords was one from Andrew Fisher (March 23rd): 'It was a noble act to restrain your feelings in the matter of the Dardanelles Report discussion. . . .'

[March 28th, 1917]

... I had a 'very hot' morning with War Cabinet!¹ Carson cross-examined me in his very best browbeating manner, as if I were a co-respondent in a divorce suit! Balfour also very nasty, and so was Lord French. In fact, it was a fight all round, but both Lloyd George and Bonar Law affectionate and sympathetic, and Lloyd George made quite a nice speech about me as I left the table. They had about 25 there. Everyone was there! Both Milner and Curzon² were inclined to take my side, I think. Well, it's all in the day's work! As Cromwell greatly said when against his will he left his 'wood side' and 'flock of sheep' to undertake his great adventure, '*He hoped he might prevent some imminent evil*'! I 'went' for Jellicoe and he took it beautifully! I said even Nelson would have made a mess of the German submarine menace — not his line any more than Jellicoe's. Jellicoe's place the Fleet! ...

F.

414: TO DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

36, Berkeley Square
March 28th, 1917

Private

Dear Prime Minister,

I hardly liked to go further with my remarks this morning [at the War Cabinet], recognizing how very valuable your time is, but I would have liked to have added how appalling it is that the Germans may now be about to deal a deadly blow to Russia by sending a large German force by sea from Kiel to take St. Petersburg (*which, as the*

¹ Fisher gave seven reasons for believing that invasion was now feasible: his diminished confidence, owing to the withdrawal of Jellicoe from the command of the Grand Fleet; the increasing German submarine menace; the demonstration at Gallipoli of the practicability of landing, and of maintaining, an expedition in the face of fire; the fact that the German Fleet was under the higher command of a military officer, Hindenburg, who might order the Fleet to take risks which no naval officer would contemplate; the risk to the Grand Fleet from mines and submarines in its passage to the vicinity of the landing places; the recent increase in the size of the German Army; the fact that ample German transport was available. The War Cabinet thanked the Admiral for his views and undertook to give them careful consideration in their examination of the problem of home defence.

² The first Earl (afterwards first Marquess) Curzon, leader of the House of Lords, 1916-1924, and member of the War Cabinet, 1916-1918.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

Russian Prime Minister [1906-1911], Stolypin, told me, is the key of Russia! All is concentrated there!). And here we are with our Fleet passive and unable to frustrate this German sea attack on Russia.

All this due to the grievous faulty naval strategy of not adopting the Baltic Project put before Mr. Asquith in association with the scheme for the British Army advancing along the Belgian Coast, by which we should have recaptured Antwerp, and there would have been no German submarine menace such as now is. An armada of 612 vessels were constructed to carry out this policy, thanks to your splendid approval of the cost when you were Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I. Our naval strategy has been unimaginative.

II. Our shipbuilding policy has been futile, inasmuch as it has not coped with the German submarine menace.

III. Our naval intelligence of the enemy's doings is good-for-nothing.

For it is impossible to conceive there would have been apathy at the Admiralty, had it been known how the Germans were building submarines in such numbers — *3 a week*, Sir John Jellicoe told us. *I say 5 a week!*

Yours,

Fisher

P.S If any disaster befalls the Grand Fleet owing to Jellicoe not being in command, then England will be invaded.

415: TO ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY

36, Berkeley Square
March 29th, 1917

Private and Confidential

My dear Beatty,

Yesterday, by the Prime Minister's desire (*and by no wish of my own!*), I was at the War Cabinet meeting to discuss the probabilities of a German invasion of England, and I very explicitly stated that what was formerly *impracticable* was now *feasible*! But I won't trouble you further about that matter, though it is absorbingly appalling! Added to which we have a great German expedition going by sea

from Kiel to capture St. Petersburg, and our Grand Fleet, through our insane effete naval strategy, notwithstanding our overwhelming sea supremacy, compelled to look on inactive at this German armada proceeding by sea from Kiel to Petrograd!

My reason for writing to you is my quarrel with Jellicoe for giving up the command of the Grand Fleet, for which I selected him 13 years ago and for which ever since every sort of pressure has been exercised to advance him to that end, and, as you know, 3 days before the War he superseded Callaghan in pursuance of a long standing arrangement, though Callaghan had got the Grand Fleet into splendid order, but, as in the similar case of Admiral Togo, who also superseded his predecessor on the very eve of war, Jellicoe was the better man.

Jellicoe's reason for giving up the Grand Fleet was to deal with the German submarine menace, but, as I told the War Cabinet yesterday, Nelson would have made a d—d mess of the German submarine menace, because not his line! It's purely a case of providing the right APPARATUS on a gigantic scale that will squash the German submarine menace! Jellicoe has been 4 months at it, *and the menace is worse than when he came! Half a million tons of shipping sunk by German submarines in February.*

At the meeting yesterday one of the members of the War Cabinet asked me if by my remarks about Jellicoe I was thinking of you, and I denied hotly that I made any other point than that *it was criminal folly to remove Jellicoe, who for 13 years had been designated and trained for the position!* And, as Lord Rosebery pungently said, it was equivalent to removing Nelson from command of the Fleet before Trafalgar, and the real cause for removing Jellicoe was to prop up an effete and tottering naval administration!

Personally, I should have got you to consent to be First Sea Lord if Jackson had to go. I wrote that to the Prime Minister, *and I have frequently said this for the last year!* You would have been a better First Sea Lord than Jellicoe, but I won't give you the reason, as it would be invidious and unnecessary. This letter is absolutely private between you and me. I only write it because of the incident at the War Cabinet yesterday, as it will appear in the Official Record of the meeting.

Jellicoe wrote to me when I remonstrated with him for giving up the command of the Grand Fleet that I had so very greatly praised you in a letter to him a year ago. SO I DID! AND I PRAISE YOU NOW! BUT THAT IS NOT THE POINT! THE POINT IS that Jellicoe (so

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superlatively fitted for his then post) left it for an inferior political position!

Yours always,

Fisher

416: TO ROBERT DONALD¹

36, Berkeley Square
March 29th, 1917

Private

Forgive pencil —

I'm very busy.

My dear Donald,

I've struggled to respond to your desire for a rousing telegram to the Russian people, but I couldn't evolve anything good enough beyond: 'STICK TO IT!!! AND THE HOHENZOLLERNS WILL GO NEXT, AND SO END THE WAR!' I tell you solemnly that if every newspaper and every public man and all our Allies would, WITH ONE VOICE, say to the German people: '*We will never make peace with a Hohenzollern*', the German people would THEN have a revolution much *easier* than the Russian! *and we would have a German Republic!!!* The German soldiers are sick to death of the War, and the German homes are crying for peace.

Yours, in haste,

Fisher

417: FROM LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

Offices of the War Cabinet
March 29th, 1917

My dear Lord Fisher,

Please excuse a dictated letter. In the circumstances I return your correspondence with the late Prime Minister regarding the War. I have not had time to finish reading it, but I can see that you made

¹ Donald had invited Fisher and other public men to send a message, via the *Daily Chronicle*, to the Russian people after the March Revolution. On the Revolution, Fisher wrote to Arnold White on June 2nd: 'Who'd have thought of Russia as she is! How clever not to kill the Czar! The Russian peasants are used to Czars being killed and another Czar as God rising in his place! but to lock up God like Smith or Brown, that quite eradicated their old superstition!'

some rather remarkable forecasts. In connection with your prophecies, it would interest you to learn that my wife turned up a letter of yours a few days ago written to me from Naples, in 1910, I think, in which you prophesied that Asquith's Government would last until November 1916. As a matter of fact, they went out of office on December 2nd, 1916, but their fall was practically certain on the 30th November. Rather a good shot. I shall await with interest your revised ['further' — F.] memorandum, which I will circulate to the War Cabinet.

Yours ever,

M. P. A. Hankey

418: TO GENERAL SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON

36, Berkeley Square
March 30th, 1917

Private

My dear Robertson,

You asked me a very pertinent question at the War Cabinet day before yesterday. '*The invasion having been perpetrated*, could the Enemy keep open his communications?' The official précis of the War Cabinet meeting is not explicit enough, so I trouble you with this amplification (you being the chief military authority in this realm). The answer to you is that the facts that render the invasion of this country feasible now (*when before it was impracticable*) are the same facts that render feasible the keeping open by the Enemy of his communications after the invasion (and which before was impracticable for him!).

The removal of Jellicoe — *the incomparable Jellicoe* — from the command of the Grand Fleet, for which he was designated 13 years ago and [had] been continuously prepared for by an unusual succession of sea appointments above his position on the List of Flag Officers, is nothing short of a *crime*! As I stated to the War Cabinet, it is precisely similar to removing Nelson before Trafalgar for the inferior position of First Sea Lord. And, as I also said to the War Cabinet, Nelson would have made a d—d mess of the submarine menace had it existed in his day. That was not his line! The dissipation of the submarine menace is a question of APPARATUS! (and its gigantic provision) together with elemental *push* and *ginger* in the

application. There is nothing satanic in Jellicoe — he's a saint! and suffers the continuance at the Admiralty of those who have brought us into this d—d mess! But to revert to the point at issue:

Hindenburg will order out the German Fleet to the furthest northern limit to a possible Trafalgar (as he did the 10 destroyers he sent into the Channel lately between Folkestone and Boulogne), but it may NOT be a Trafalgar (which I think Jellicoe's presence would have ensured!). Collingwood was splendid, but Nelson had a 'Touch'! In the progress south, after the battle, of our (in any case) diminished Fleet, the Germans will assuredly strew mines and dispose submarines and destroyers in its path, so that (as Jellicoe wrote to me) the British Fleet would be greatly diminished on its arrival south, there again to face an innumerable company of German submarines and destroyers and German submarine MINELAYERS. That would necessitate the retirement of our Fleet into a protected harbour. So (and we now come to the point you raised) our *surface* vessels, in their endeavour to interrupt the German communications, would be utterly destroyed by the prodigious available number of German submarines. You know the art of war — *concentrate your effort!* Our totals would be dissipated on other services at the German '*selected*' moment. If a year ago the enclosed German official number of German submarines was stated to be (I FEEL SURE RIGHTLY) at 220, and Jellicoe says they produce three new ones every week (I SAY FIVE!), and we don't kill anything like that number (so Jellicoe said) — then the case is parlous! Please note that the submarine has perfected the torpedeing of destroyers. I alluded to that at the War Cabinet. (It is true.) So, in case of invasion, the German communications will be kept open and Hindenburg, to gain that end, will send out the German Fleet just as Napoleon sent out Villeneuve, against every naval consideration! The Gallipoli landing (and its shores never free from hostile gunfire till its evacuation) has tumbled down the Walls of Jericho of the Blue Water School, of which I was formerly Chief! I've been to Damascus like St. Paul, and [am] converted.¹

Yours,

Fisher

¹ To the 'Blue Water School' of thought, which was the position of the Admiralty and of the Navy generally, the Navy was an absolute bar to invasion. Invasion would never be attempted, history taught, until the enemy had established control of the sea and his communications were secure. Robertson replied on May 1st: 'I have re-read the papers you sent me on 30th March. It is a sad story. I can only hope we *may* get an adequate move on before it is too late.'

36, Berkeley Square
April 11th, 1917

Private and Secret

My dear Friend,

Thanks for your letter just received. What I am going to write in reply is *very private*! I saw yesterday (by his desire) a close friend of the Prime Minister, who told him my statement before the War Cabinet a week ago had produced a considerable impression (but I imagine he leaves out Balfour and Carson from the admiring listeners!!!). It seems quite certain (*so my friend assures me*) that Lloyd George would undoubtedly have had me in the Government, *and had so determined* (he says), but the Tories throttled him! If some big, big disaster comes along, or the submarine menace develops (*as it promises to do*), then Lloyd George would ride on the wave of an outbreak of the masses and have me back! (*Too late!!!!*) I'm just repeating, as I don't believe it myself! for Lloyd George himself would be swept out and someone else swept in!

My friend says what is completely occupying all the thoughts of those directing the War is what the Germans are going to do with the 50 new divisions (equal to a million men) that the Germans have now got massed as a reserve. Is it Petrograd, or Italy, or the invasion of England, or Calais?

I sent you a copy of my letter to the Prime Minister (since I attended the War Cabinet), pointing out how our very stupid fatal policy of not seizing the Baltic in July 1915 (*when it was quite easy*) has resulted in the Germans being now able to send an army by sea to take Petrograd. That will come off so soon as the melting ice in the Baltic permits, and that is my view of what the Germans are going to do with some portion of this reserve of theirs of 50 divisions! *The balance will be for England!*

Carson and Lloyd George have gone up to the Grand Fleet for a 'Beatty-fic vision'!

Heaven bless you both. I am somewhat in the dumps!

Yours,

Fisher

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

420: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

April 15th, 1917

'THE EARLY BIRD.' 4 A.M.!

My dear Winston,

The question is — 'Won't you handicap your great resolve by associating me with it?' I fear there is not that spirit abroad to say:

'Oh! for one hour of blind old Dandolo
The [Th'] octogenarian Chief!
Byzantium's conquering foe!' etc., etc.

(*You know your Byron!*)¹

The Public will not reflect that '*A man is only as old as his arteries!*' which reminds me that Sir Bertrand Dawson has invited himself to see mine this very afternoon! being apparently a source of pleasure to him! (I always fear his putting me in the *Lancet*² as a '*freak*'! But truly I am '*exceeding fit*'!)

But 'to return to our mutttons'! I doubt our being ready before October! October is a lovely month! St. Luke's summer begins on October 18 and St. Martin's on November 11th! *These two Saints never fail!* I put down for your cogitation the following vital necessities:

1. The British Army must work along the sea coast, as outlined in the autumn of 1914 (and agreed to by Sir John French).

2. An immense cloud of aircraft *imperative*. (There ought now to have been *thousands!!!*)

3. Prodigious mine-laying facilities must now be instantly begun. (The Admiralty apathy for two years has been CRIMINAL.)

4. An *armada* of 'submarine-proof' craft for attack purposes will take 5 months. (*I am speaking to [by the] book in this matter.*)

5. Schwab must *now* give us the 'H' type of submarines in 5 months. *He can and will!* (*This type of submarine holds the field.*)

6. The 500 *self-propelled* barges we provided for the attack on the German coast for the intended *big operation* of July 23rd, 1915 (see the

¹ From Byron's *Childe Harold*, Canto IV, Stanza 12. Naturally, the exclamation points are Fisher's. Enrico Dandolo was one of the strongest leaders in Venetian history, though 84 when elected Doge. 'Dandolo may hold the record for Generalship at an advanced age (he seems to have been actually 90 at the time of the capture of Constantinople [1204]), but Justinian's Generals Belisarius and Narses were really more remarkable, because they conducted really big and important campaigns in their 70's or 80's. A historical essay on age in relation to strategy, conjoined with youth in the field of action and of tactics, deserves a competent pen!' (*Some Notes by Lord Fisher for His Friends*, p. 129).

² The weekly *Lancet* is one of the leading English medical journals.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

print prepared with General Callwell, D.M.O.), require to be amplified! *and another mass of them ordered!* They only draw a few inches of water, being flat-bottomed craft. (The present lot will be of inestimable value for gas and tanks and mines.)

7. The bay inside the Scaw must be one, and I agree that 'The Texel' [is] the other delectable spot!

8. The recapture of Antwerp will come!

9. The 'crumbling of Russia' dishes the Baltic Project, but who knows but what the Russian Army may not revivify! St. Just cut off heads of Generals in the French Revolution and got an invincible army in consequence!

10. For two years the Admiralty building policy has had no aim! *It has none now!* An instant big change is vital!

As repeatedly affirmed, 'This War both by land and sea is solely a question of "APPARATUS"'! always presuming that d—d fools are not going to be entrusted with the apparatus when provided!

'THE ARMY MAY NOT WIN THE WAR
BEFORE THE NAVY LOSES IT!'

Yours,

Fisher

421: TO REAR-ADMIRAL WILLIAM S. SIMS¹

36, Berkeley Square
April 17th, 1917

My dear Sims,

I am so delighted you are coming to lunch at the above address to-morrow, Wednesday, at 1.30 to meet General Smuts!² HE IS A WAR MAN! *He has imagination and audacity! He understands that by sea and land this war is a war of APPARATUS.* I presume of course that you don't put the apparatus when provided in the hands of d—d fools! (*which alas! we have done!*). We have not shot a single General or Admiral in this War! WE'VE PROMOTED THEM! Voltaire was right about shooting Admiral Byng!

All this is written before I see you to-morrow to explain why I

¹ Sims commanded American naval forces in European waters, (April) 1917-1919.

² Smuts was representative of the Union of South Africa in the Imperial War Cabinet, 1917-1918.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

send enclosed (*from the best American on earth*), because he expands the view that America ought to supply the APPARATUS for the Russians and take the Russians in hand themselves. Two great democracies! Please support this view and make me happy!

Yours,

Fisher

422: TO REAR-ADMIRAL WILLIAM S. SIMS

36, Berkeley Square
April 19th, 1917

PRIVATE

My dear Sims,

... Keep very secret the paper I gave you yesterday and return with the others. I didn't like to bore you about Holland and the Texel yesterday. You can land an army at one go in the North Sea Canal between IJmuiden and Amsterdam — it takes big ships. I enjoyed meeting you yesterday. I hope I didn't bore you. *All enthusiasts are bores.*

Yours,

Fisher

423: TO?

36, Berkeley Square
April 22nd, 1917

Private and Confidential

My dear —,

It is very illuminating how Lord Curzon says no word about the 'Russian Republic' in enclosed.¹ *It's the same spirit as prevents a Greek Republic!* It's the same spirit as is at the back of *The Times* leading article of yesterday (April 21), propping up the *trades union of Kings!*²

¹ Curzon had welcomed the American entry into the war (House of Lords, April 18th): 'We rejoice that the three flags — the Stars and Stripes, the Tricolour and the Union Jack — will float side by side both upon the seas and in the trenches of the Continent.'

² A *Times* leader of April 21st, on the 'Golden Link', dealt with the role of the Crown in the British system of government, particularly as a force binding the Empire together 'as no other institution does or can do'.

Never was there such an occasion or such an opportunity to establish a great ring of free republics as now at this moment. Instead of which we are sickened with the word '*Imperial*'!

No worse choice than Balfour could have been made to send to America! He is an '*anti-democrat*' to his finger tips! and so are all his entourage! (*I know them all.*) But the British Press is emasculated! and journalistic jealousy and journalistic 'tuft-hunters' combined, like Lord Burnham and Geoffrey Robinson [Dawson] and Gwynne,¹ are losing the golden opportunity that the 'Mother of Free Parliaments shall herself be free'!

Yours,

F.

The submarine menace is *worse* than ever and won't get any better under the present régime. Jellicoe, incomparable as Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, is not the man for that job, and Carson is a tired, indolent, elderly lawyer, totally unfit for his position. I told the War Cabinet the other day that Lord Nelson would have made a d—d mess of the German submarine menace — *not his line, nor is it Jellicoe's!* I said this before Jellicoe himself, who has had 5 months at it and failed utterly. 171,000 tons of British shipping sunk last week. This does not include chartered neutral vessels or vessels so disabled that practically they are as good as sunk, nor does it include Allied vessels!

What do these continuous German destroyer raids mean???
INEPTITUDE.

424: TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

36, Berkeley Square
[April 23rd, 1917]

Dear Hankey,

Your last words in your last kind letter if I leave un-noticed may lead you to a wrong supposition, so I must say very shortly *what you yourself know absolutely as convincingly as I know myself* — that it is utter rot for the War Cabinet to send for me or anyone else as to 'plans' for

¹ The first Baron Burnham, principal proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*; H. A. Gwynne, Editor of the *Morning Post*, 1911-1937.

subduing the German submarine menace (which is now *far greater* than when taken in hand by Jellicoe last November! 5 months ago). *You know the truth in such a matter!*

It's the 'personality' that takes the matter in hand with the powers of a dictator! Do you imagine that those 612 vessels that were started in the autumn of 1914 would ever have been either begun or completed in practically 12 months, had a 'committee' been in charge or WITHOUT A SUPREME PERSONAL DIRECTION. SO IT IS NOW! (*Balfour and Carson have been living on those 612 vessels ever since.*)

Can the Army win the War before the Navy loses it? *That is the VITAL question!* As the Prime Minister says, '*Blunder after blunder!*'

Yours,

Fisher

Postscript. In the autumn of 1914, just after the War had begun, the Editor of the *Daily Express*, whom I had never met, put in large headlines in his paper what I said the day before at lunch, that 'War was bold conceptions and quick decisions'.

*'Think in oceans!
Shoot at sight!'*

But he did not finish what I then said, that *it would be a war of young men and small vessels!* That admirals and fleets *would take a 'back seat'!* That it would be a war of the submarine, the destroyer, the aeroplane, and of the individual soldier and sailor! Consequently I predicted that if the right 'APPARATUS' was provided then, the 'individuality' of the Anglo-Saxon and the Celt being superior to that of the Teuton and the Turk, who were 'machine-made' warriors, that Germany would be beaten!

Alas! We did not provide the 'APPARATUS', and so we are now suffering from the German submarine menace and from German destroyer raids in the English Channel, and the Germans are keeping the British Admiralty busy instead of our keeping the Germans busy! *All due to two years of apathy!* All due to the neglect of the 'offensive'! All due to the policy of 'KEEPING THE RING'! the saddest thing ever said by a British Admiral!¹

Is it once more 'too late'? Can the Army win the War before the Navy loses it? That just now is the 'VITAL QUESTION'!

¹ Jellicoe, in a speech of April 4th at a trade union conference, had said: 'The Navy's business so far as the Army is concerned is to hold the ring . . .'

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425: FROM LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

Offices of the War Cabinet
April 23rd, 1917

Personal and Secret

Dear Lord Fisher,

Your letter is the truest thing I have ever read. The question you pose sums up the whole thing in a nutshell. I feel my personal responsibility to be clear because I have taken the same line from the very first day of the War, when I went to my Chief on the announcement of the first of the 'K' [Kitchener] Armies being formed and uttered a solemn warning against putting our faith in land forces ('We may win on land, but lose at sea', I said), as it must inevitably react on our sea-power. Now all our strength, all our raw material, all our men, all our manufacturing resources, have been diverted to the military side of the War, and as you say, the question is: 'Can the Army win the War before the Navy loses it?' I have never ceased, from the first day of the War up till to-day, to do my utmost to concentrate our resources on the naval side, and I have innumerable documents to prove it, but I fear I am merely regarded as a crank on the matter. A very important person on whom I pressed the point the other day merely replied: 'Well, I have never taken that matter as seriously as you have', and brushed it aside. Now, however, the authorities are frightened, and I hope we shall get something done, if it is not too late.

Yours ever,

M. P. A. Hankey

426: TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

36, Berkeley Square
April 24th, 1917

My dear Hankey,

Your most expressive letter in answer to mine of yesterday reached me late last night. The crisis is momentous and is summed up as you say in the concluding words of my letter: '*Can the Army win the War before the Navy loses it.*' for starvation at home and lessening of

supplies to our Armies abroad would necessitate an ignoble peace!

But there is another cloud on the horizon (no bigger than a man's hand at present!), and *The Times*, like Elijah's servant, says, '*There is nothing*'! But shortly these heavens of ours '*will be black with clouds*' and the people will say, '*Shall not England, the Mother of Free Parliaments, herself be free?*' and you will have a clean sweep, as in Russia was so easily arranged when the masses decided on it! It's a pity Lord Curzon so markedly left out Russia in his oration in the House of Lords, and this propping up of King Constantine as against a Greek Republic is extraordinarily short-sighted on our part! But the days of democracy have come and there will be a great ring of great republics! If the Prime Minister has the leisure, I hope you will show him my letter to you. '*The Empire hangs on a thread*' is what an ex-Cabinet Minister said to me not many hours ago!

Yours always,

Fisher

427: TO JAMES MASTERTON-SMITH

May 5th, 1917

Private and Personal

My dear Masterton,

It was a joy to see you again the other day . . . I think Sir Edward Carson was very cordial to my distinguished colleagues. The real head man is Sir J. J. Thomson, the President of the Royal Society. I think you know that, but I'm not sure that Sir Edward Carson quite appreciates that fact, and you know that these learned men, as chosen by Mr. Balfour with Lord Rayleigh's advice, are the very limits of science! So it would bring much trouble if they are not tactfully treated. For instance, Admiral Duff¹ is treating with a Mr. Nash (so we heard for the first time) with an invention on the one basis that he distrusts Sir J. J. Thomson and his distinguished fellow scientists! And then you heard Sir Joseph say: 'Does the man think we shall steal his invention?' I just mention that if only these eminent men are to have thrown to them just what suits the Departments of the Admiralty, you will have an exodus! I am writing this quite privately to you, as you know well how to '*oil the machine*'! Sir J. J. Thomson was here this morning very sad at the meeting having taken place, which was quite unexpected by me and was apparently

¹ Rear-Admiral (afterwards Sir) A. L. Duff, Director, Anti-Submarine Division, Naval Staff, 1916-1917.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

the outcome of a private interview Sir Charles Parsons had with Sir Edward Carson. . . .

Perhaps when an opportunity offers, Sir Edward, by means of an arranged question, can express his obligations to these great men of science. However, this is quite a private suggestion of mine.

Yours,

Fisher

428: TO THOMAS J. MACNAMARA¹

Board of Invention and Research

May 19th, 1917

Private and Confidential

Dear Macnamara,

Sir R. Peirse has sent me copies of proposed replies to Parliamentary questions respecting this Board, of which I am President, and I understand they have been deferred with the presumed object of heckling you, as the opportunity did not present itself on Thursday. I understand that Mr. Butcher asked you, May 14th, whether I attended regularly, and you naturally replied: '*I imagine so*' (question 36).

Well! your imagination is all right! I find in the last 12 months I've only absented myself 24 days out of the 365 from London, and every day been in communication with the business of the Board. As you may surely realize, the number of the weekly meetings of the Central Committee are no indication whatever of the personal attention given by the Committee daily to the affairs of the Board. You have doubtless had a copy of the Report of what the Board has done, as well as the memoranda dated February 22, 1917 (B.I.R. 4907/17), and March 29th, 1917, but I enclose two copies for your personal keeping.

I am personally impervious to malignancy, and wear '*the impenetrable armour of contempt and fortitude*', but the very great scientists I am associated with, and who so splendidly devote themselves to the work of the Board, deserve, I think, a kindly appreciation if they are sneered at.

Yours,

Fisher

¹ By way of background: Lambert had written to the Admiral on May 16th: 'I don't know what the movement is, but there is a concerted attack on you by innuendo that you do not do any work, or attend regularly at the B.I.R.'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

429: TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

36, Berkeley Square
May 28th, 1917

My dear Hankey,

I fear I did not thank you for that interesting fact that in turning over past correspondence a letter of mine to you in 1910 predicted that Mr. Asquith would leave office in *November 1916*!¹ If it fortunes that Lady Hankey has not burnt it, perhaps she'll send me the date for my 'Reminiscences' to add to two other forecasts of mine — one written in 1905, that war with Germany would break out in August 1914, and that Jellicoe, then obscure, would be Admiralissimo! (*I believe I wrote this to you again in 1910!*)

This German air raid last Friday on Folkestone 'points a moral and adorns a tale'! If those three meetings in November 1914 of the War Council, which Sir John French came specially from France to attend, to consider the British Army advancing along the seashore flanked by the British Fleet, and for which he only requested two divisions, had been given effect to, we should never have had any German submarine menace, nor these air raids, and Antwerp would have been recaptured.² Spasmodic bombardments of Zeebrugge (*as Mr. Asquith agreed on the morning of January 28, 1915*), unsupported by military co-operation, are futile!

Well! There it is! And I feel like Elijah when he went that day's journey into the wilderness and sat down under the juniper tree and requested for himself that he might die! But, as you know, 'an angel touched him' and said: 'Arise and eat' — which, in modern language, means that Elijah was 'TO KEEP FIT'!!! So I eat, drink, and try to be merry! And my dear friend, Sir Bertrand Dawson, who came to see me the other day before returning to France, told me I was as fit as 10 years ago when he looked me over! *So I may yet get my chance, like Elijah!* And how well I know what I could do! So did he! But all this is vain, so no more.

I have my 'plan'! but I remember Mr. Burke's immortal words! *See herewith.*

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Actually, it was a letter from Bad Nauheim of June 4th, 1911.

² In a very similar letter to Archibald Hurd on May 20th, the Admiral had added: '*It will have to be done now!* No "dug outs" for the Germans there, like at the Somme, for when you go down a few feet you come to water, so our artillery ashore and afloat dominate the situation.'

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

Mr. Burke in the House of Commons: 'I have no faith in any scheme of war in which the "*execution*" is divorced from the "*plan*". Sir Bertrand Dawson says his is better! '*Don't prescribe till you're called in!*'

430: FROM LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

Offices of the War Cabinet
May 28th, 1917

My dear Lord Fisher,

I am sending your letter along to my wife and asking her to write to you and send both a copy of your letter to me in 1910 about Mr. Asquith's leaving office in November 1916, and also to write to you about your prophecy of war with Germany beginning in 1914, and Sir John Jellicoe being in command of the Grand Fleet when war broke out.

I have the clearest recollection of the incident. My wife and I had been down to you for a week-end to Kilverstone. You had persuaded us not to go up by the early train on the Monday, and you took us to the rose-garden, where there was a sun-dial with a charming and interesting inscription. You linked one arm through my wife's and the other through mine, and walked us round and round the paths, and it was walking thus that you made the extraordinary prophecy — 'The war will come in 1914, and Jellicoe will command the Grand Fleet.' I remember that my practical mind revolted against the prophecy, and I pressed you for reasons. You then told us that the Kiel Canal, according to experts whom you had assembled five or six years before to examine this question, could not be enlarged for the passage of the new German dreadnoughts before 1914, and that Germany, though bent on war, would not risk it until this date. As regards Jellicoe, you explained how you yourself had so cast his professional career in such directions as to train him for the post, and, after a brief horoscope of his normal prospects of promotion, you indicated your intention of watching over his career — as you actually did.

All this remains vividly in my mind . . .

The calculation itself was an interesting one, but what strikes me now as more remarkable is the 'flare' with which you forecasted with

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

certainly the state of mind of the German Emperor and his advisers, and their intention to go to war the first moment they dared.

What you say about Zeebrugge is very true.

No more now.

In haste, Yours ever,

M. P. A. Hankey

431: TO DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

House of Lords

June 12th, 1917

My dear Prime Minister,

In November 1914 Sir John French came specially from France to attend the War Council to consider a proposal [put forward by the Admiralty] that the British Army should advance along the seashore flanked and supported by the British Fleet. Had this proposal been given effect to, the German submarine menace would have been deprived of much of its strength and Enemy air raids on our coast would have been far more difficult. The considerations which made me urge this proposal at that time have continuously grown stronger, and to-day I feel it my duty to press upon you the vital necessity of a joint naval and military operation of this kind.

I do not feel justified in arguing the military advantages, which are, however, so obvious as to be patent to the whole world, nor the political advantage of getting in touch with Holland along the Scheldt, but solely from a naval point of view the enterprise is one that ought to be undertaken with all our powers without further delay. The present occasion is peculiarly favourable, as we can call upon the support of the whole American Fleet.¹

Yours truly,

Fisher

¹ McKenna had helped Fisher get this letter into shape. The Prime Minister opened and read the letter at the War Cabinet that very day, so his Secretary told Fisher - 'and they are going to do it', the Admiral reported to Cecil Fisher the next day.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

432: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

The Manor House
Berwick St. John, Salisbury
June 15th, 1917

My dear Pamela,

Your enticing letter to a dance found me preparing for an assignation with Sir William Robertson's wife, following a previous gossip with Lady Haig (so I'm very thick with the military!), and Lord French told a friend of mine that my views were in course of adoption and offered to have a copy of my memorandum of *November 1914!* (which is very interesting!) *but don't mention this.* Well! I couldn't come to the dance, as I was busy otherwise preparing to get here, and greatly grateful to Reggie for his kind letter to me seeing no reason why I shouldn't come here. *This place is most delicious!*

No time for more, as post is going. This is no lie!

Yours till a cinder,

F.

433: TO SIR WILLIAM WATSON

Cassiobury Park
June 24th, 1917

Private and Confidential

Dear Sir William Watson,

... I VALUE EXTREMELY ALL YOU SAY!¹ First, *my plan!* I have told them and have kept on telling them the one and only way of dealing with the German submarine menace. When you have a plague of wasps, you don't send little boys with butterfly nets to catch individual wasps. YOU TAKE THE WASPS' NEST! In November 1914, on three separate occasions Sir John French was had over from France to discuss taking the wasps' nest! *At length they were all convinced!* And Sir John French only asked for two divisions to accomplish it, but it was abandoned! Had this proposal been

¹ Watson had written on June 22nd, urging Fisher not 'to stand on ceremony. You are credited with the possession of an undivulged scheme or plan for defeating the German submarines. Whether the present heads of the Admiralty have asked for it or not, ought you not to communicate it to them, of course under seal of secrecy? ... Will you allow mere wounded pride or any such consideration to stand in the way of a sublime and supreme achievement at the critical hour of England's fate?'

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given effect to, not only would the German submarine bases have been captured, but the enemy air raids on our coast would have been far more difficult. *But that's not all! The military advantage might quite likely have ended the War!!!* And we should have got in touch with Holland along the Scheldt! (an immense political advantage). Quite apart from the recapture of Antwerp. All the considerations that made me initiate and urge this war-ending proposal in NOVEMBER 1914 have continuously grown stronger! *The vital necessity of it has become more vital!* Not only that, but we now have the whole of the American Fleet to make the plan more peculiarly favourable than ever!

Very well! Ten days ago I wrote to the Prime Minister and once more urged him: 'To-day I feel it my duty to press upon you the vital necessity of a joint naval and military operation of this kind (*put forward in November 1914*). The enterprise is one that ought to be undertaken with all our powers *without further delay*!' It may be it is going to be done. I had no reply. Not even 'Thank you'! *They are nauseated by my repetitions!* It's the one and only remedy (is that plan of mine) for the German submarine menace, and it would end the war!¹ But here again Mr. Burke comes in with his very famous statement in one of his most famous speeches in the House of Commons: 'I have no faith in any scheme of war in which the EXECUTION is divorced from the PLAN!' AUDACITY, IMAGINATION, CELERITY! AND DAMNABLE PERTINACITY! These are Nelsonic and Napoleonic attributes.

Napoleonic in audacity.

Nelsonic in execution.

Cromwellian in thoroughness.

The men to lead have to be picked! Immensely preponderating forces — 'only numbers can annihilate', said Nelson. Nelson hated the word 'victory' — what he fought for was 'annihilation'.

As to the submarine paper, it's a secret, official document, printed under the Official Secrets Act. An ex-Lord Chancellor [Loreburn] (like you) entreated me to publish it. I wish I could. *But it would be very egotistical! . . .*

Yours,

Fisher

. . .

¹ 'Imagine Smuts with half a million men advancing from Dunkirk along the Belgian Coast, and the *Furious* with her 18-inch guns bombarding Zeebrugge, with a speed that makes her quite inaccessible to any raid of the German Fleet!! Have we no Jephthah? Judges, Chapter XI, Verse 7' (Fisher to Lambert, July 7th, 1917).

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

434: TO C. P. SCOTT

36, Berkeley Square

June 26th, 1917

Private

Dear Mr. Scott,

I sent you a registered letter enclosing copy of a letter to Lloyd George [which] I wrote him on *June 12*... I've just returned to London and hear the plan has been emasculated! What Burke said is true: 'I have no faith in any scheme in which the execution is divorced from the plan.' Alas! Alas! Aggressive sea war has disappeared! Our splendid Navy locked up! *It's maddening!*

Almost as maddening is how utterly we are controlled by a small knot of Tories — Curzon, Milner, and Bonar Law! Lloyd George is always 'climbing down'! The whole Press of the Country is inept! A Republic will come here as assuredly as in Russia! Like d—d fools the Government is trying to bolster up the House of Lords! They've alienated the new Russian Republic by Milner's action when he was in Russia and not sending Ramsay MacDonald and Co. in a warship to Russia, and preventing Venizelos from being President of a Greek Republic.¹ The Italian King [Victor Emmanuel III] will disappear any day — the whole upper class in Italy are in favour of Germany and the whole of the people in favour of the Allies. *I can assure you of this fact.* And we anger and irritate by allowing the King to talk of 'MY Empire'! We are going to be one in a Commonwealth of Nations with a common speech! And probably a man named Smillie will be the new Cromwell! Our ruling classes don't appreciate the imminent Revolution! Nor do the peers — nor does Parliament! *IT IS HERE! AT THE DOOR!*²

Yours,

F.

¹ Milner had been sent to Russia on the eve of the Russian Revolution to arrange about munition supplies; Ramsay MacDonald, Treasurer of the Labour Party, 1912-1924, Labour M.P., 1906-1918, later Prime Minister, 1924, 1929-1935; Eleutherios Venizelos, vigorous champion of the Allied cause, had been instrumental in forcing the abdication of King Constantine I on June 12th, 1917, in favour of his son Alexander. He formed a ministry on June 26th, which took Greece into the war on the side of the Allies on June 27th.

² 'I talked for an hour last Thursday to a working engineer, who I know as a reliable man and sent by his employer to foreign countries before the War to exploit an invention which brought in a fortune! A Commonwealth and a Cromwell are coming along. (I don't know if Mr. Smillie is Cromwell! He didn't say!) Let us hope the English Revolution won't be *à la Russe*, as they had to put 1,600 Russian naval officers under the ice!' (Fisher to ?, ca. June 1st, 1917). Though Fisher elsewhere refers to 'Richard Smillie', he no doubt meant Robert Smillie, President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, 1912-1921, later Chairman of the General Council of Trade Unions, 1924-1925.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918
435: TO SIR WILLIAM WATSON

39, Berkeley Square
July 7th, 1917

Dear Sir William Watson,

... I greatly admire Lloyd George for his great Celtic qualities. He has both imagination and audacity, but not pertinacity! However, we shall win, because we are right, but our Jephthah has yet to come. I think our Cromwell is amongst the masses. I'm not sure that his name isn't Smillie — a labouring man. We seem again to want these famous words:

'Remove that bauble!'

and

'Bind their kings in chains, and their nobles with links of iron!'¹

I'M A DEMOCRAT THROUGH AND THROUGH.

... We are the lost ten tribes of Israel, otherwise there would never be the Commonwealth of Nations there is now speaking the English tongue. This war will bring about a great federation with its capital at Jerusalem! And a man like the Swiss President, with no more power, taken in rotation as a figurehead. However, I am losing myself now in heavenly speculations, so good-bye, and may we soon meet.

Yours,

Fisher

A big raid now in progress now over my head! And these Bishops want to do away now with the 58th Psalm!!!²

¹ To bind their Kings with chains,
And their nobles with fetters of iron ...
Psalms, cxlix, 8.

The 'bauble' reference is clearly to the British monarchy.

² Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation?
Do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?
Yea, in heart ye work wickedness ...

36, Berkeley Square
July 11th, 1917

My dear Prime Minister,

In putting before your urgent notice the two following propositions, I have consulted no one and seen no experts. It is the emanation of my own brain, and, as the Latin grammar says, I write *currente calamo*!

Owing to two years of departmental apathy and inconceivable strategical, as well as tactical, blunders, we are wrongly raided in the air, and being ruined under water. I remember a very famous speech of yours where you pointed out that we had been fourteen times too late! This letter is to persuade you against two more too-lates!

(1) *The Air*. You want two ideas carried out.

- (a) A multitude of bombing aircraft made like Ford cars (so therefore very expeditiously obtained thereby).
- (b) The other type of aircraft constantly improving to get better fighting qualities. *The air is going to win the War, owing to the sad and grievous other neglects.*

(2) *The Water*. Here we have a very simple proposition. Now that America has joined us, we have a simply overwhelming sea preponderance! ARE YOU NOT GOING TO DO ANYTHING WITH THIS? MAKE the German Fleet fight, AND YOU WIN THE WAR. How can you make the German Fleet fight? By undertaking on a huge scale with an immense armada of special rapidly-built craft an operation that threatens the German Fleet's existence! That operation, on the basis in my mind, is one absolutely sure of success, because the force employed is so gigantic as to be negligible of fools. It will take ten months to gestate. If you sweep away the German Fleet, you sweep away all else and end the War, as then you have the Baltic clear, and a straight run of 82 miles only from the Pomeranian coast to Berlin, and it is the Russian Army we want to enter Berlin, not the English or the French.

Yours truly,

Fisher

July 28th, 1917

My dear Rosebery,

I have been ruminating, pondering, cogitating, meditating, and studying all aspects of my present position, and your kind exemplification of how I stand as regards those in power to control my fate, and how I stand also with the Public, Parliament and Press.

I propose to summarize my position. I may have to be egotistical! (I've come to the conclusion it's only a d—d fool or a saint who is not egotistical, and I don't claim to be either!)

The only real, British, unalloyed victory in this War is the Battle of the Falkland Islands, which was not a victory — it was annihilation! for von Spee's entire Fleet was sunk, and that Fleet (had it not been destroyed) would assuredly have sunk our British Cape Squadron and Botha's transports, which were en route for German S.W. Africa, and we should thereby have lost Africa. This great fact has never been properly realized by the Public or the Press or the Parliament, and yet it was accomplished in the teeth of violent naval opposition at my unforgivable rashness in weakening our Grand Fleet by taking away fast battle cruisers, etc.

'Rashness in war is prudence.
Prudence in war is imbecility.'

(I think I must have said that when I was about 12 years old, after reading Southey's *Life of Nelson*, still the best history of Nelson!)

The Falkland Islands episode restored the drooping spirits of the British Public, rehabilitated the British Admiralty after the imbecile poltroonery that lost us the *Goeben* and sunk the *Cressy*, the *Hogue*, and the *Aboukir*, and the Antwerp failure; and an armada of 612 vessels were authorized by Mr. Lloyd George (as Chancellor of the Exchequer) which, on July 23rd, 1915, were to have carried out a great amphibious series of operations in northern waters that would have finished the War, as we could have landed with certainty and sure success a million of Russian soldiers on the Pomeranian Coast within easy distance of Berlin.

The Dardanelles project smashed this great plan, and the great armada was perverted and diverted to purposes for which it was unsuited, and we lost the opportunity of recapturing the Belgian Coast and Antwerp, for which Sir John French, in *November 1914*, only asked for two more divisions and the co-operation of the British Fleet

BOARD OF INVENTION...1917-1918

advancing on the flank of the British Army. (On June 12, 1917, that project still held the field. I enclose a copy of my letter to the Prime Minister.)

The Dardanelles operation bled us white! The British loaf went up at one bound 10 per cent in price, and our mercantile marine got locked up in the Mediterranean, not only in supplying our own needs, but also those of our Allies; and Salonika and Palestine and Mesopotamia all flowed out of the original sin of not sticking to the decisive theatre of the war in northern waters, but more especially in the Baltic.

The printed memorandum I prepared respecting the Baltic and naval policy, written in the third month of the War, still remains irrefutable and impregnable.

After May 1915, we had two years of ineffable apathy at the Admiralty. The Government enticed Sir John Jellicoe to leave his bounden duty in commanding the Grand Fleet to become First Sea Lord. Sir John Jellicoe persuaded himself he could deal with the German submarine menace and left his post in face of the enemy, a position for which he had been sedulously prepared since the year 1905, and three days before the War superseded Admiral Sir G. Callaghan in command of the Grand Fleet.

We are not allowed to know the British official report of the tonnage sunk by German submarines, but this is the German official report:

January 1917	..	..	..	439,000 tons
February 1917	..	..	..	781,000 tons
March 1917	..	..	..	861,000 tons
April 1917	..	..	..	1,091,000 tons
May 1917	..	..	..	869,000 tons
June 1917	..	..	..	over 1,000,000 tons

So Sir John Jellicoe might have well have stayed with the Grand Fleet!

On July 11th, 1917, I wrote another letter to the Prime Minister, copy enclosed, but it has borne no fruit.

What is it you counsel me? To act as follows: To dispel the malignant lies of my being past work by seeing people of sorts and explaining to them, in the words of the great American specialist:

‘The brain of those who grow old wholesomely does not seem to age as does the rest of the human body, nor to feel so

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

distinctly as do the "*locomotive mechanisms*" the exasperating vetoes of time'!

(*Dr. Weir Mitchell*)

The 'locomotive mechanism' I might illustrate by waltzing at some music hall! The First Lord of the Admiralty went to a music hall, why shouldn't I? I *now* can dance 12 waltzes without stopping! (and hum my own waltz music!) I did it only the other day.¹

But do you think this counsel of yours would persuade that solid phalanx of retrogrades that curse me for democratizing the Navy in those glorious reforming years in which we got rid of 19½ millions sterling of parasites, and reduced the age of our Admirals, and produced men like Commodore Tyrwhitt, and got it realized that engines and not sails produced the better man! No! the only thing I can do is to await destiny — you can't hustle Providence! Rebecca tried to, and made a d—d mess of it.

Yours,

Fisher

Postscript. Had my recent letter of June 12th, 1917, to the Prime Minister been acted upon at once, the late successful German attack on the Yser would have been forestalled, and the disastrous catastrophe that befell us (in the loss of thousands of our brave troops then) would have been avoided. But alas! This War from the very beginning has been waged on a political basis, and no far-flung strategic scheme has ever been elaborated and pertinaciously adhered to. The principle has been lost sight of that the decisive theatre of the War was in the north and that the Baltic shore was the key of the War now just as much as in the time of Frederic the Great, as so fully set forth in my memorandum on the Baltic, written in the first months of the war and so very significantly alluded to by the Dardanelles Commissioners in their recent report. The War, so far as the British are concerned, has been a hand-to-mouth war! No war scheme that involves a year's preparation stands a chance! Some new political fad turns up and wrecks it! And yet it is only by the long and studious preparation of a huge specially built armada that the Navy can come into the War and finish the War, as set forth in

¹ To Lord Ranksborough on August 1st: 'I'll send you a copy of a letter I've written to a friend [Rosebery] who beseeched me to go about buttonholing people everywhere. Yesterday I was asked to meet a mass of journalists at dinner, but I declined. I really don't think it's dignified to be knocking at the back door and trying to get in that way! I'm quite well known. I can waltz 12 waltzes without stopping and I can say the Lord's Prayer backwards! *What more do you want???*'

my recent letter to the Prime Minister of July 11th, 1917. New ideas are scoffed at or so emasculated as to be impotent when put into force!

Note what took place about the submarine before the War! It was so ridiculed and ignored by those in high authority that actually there were fewer British submarines when war broke out on August 4th, 1914, than when I ceased to be First Sea Lord in January 1910! And even so late as July 10th, 1914 (three weeks before war broke out), Lord Charles Beresford makes a public speech deriding them (see *Times* of July 11th, 1914), and all this notwithstanding that the naval manœuvres of the previous autumn had established their terrific possibilities, as summed up in the printed memorandum on submarines which I prepared in February 1914, foretelling absolutely all that the German submarine menace is now accomplishing! The warning fell on deaf ears!

The drastic mining policy shadowed forth in my memorandum of 1914, while subduing the German submarine menace and rendering feasible the Baltic operation, would automatically have made the blockade so effective that Germany would have been starved out long ere this! But the submarine menace, though practically scotched in May 1915, was by two years' apathy at the Admiralty permitted to reassert itself in its present prodigious and ferocious intensity! It is just exasperating that with our really astounding naval supremacy, the Admiralty policy should be solely to 'hold the ring'! And now we have the whole of the American Fleet in addition to help us!

As I said in my printed memorandum (nearly three years ago), so far as the British Navy is concerned, the British Army might as well be in Timbuctoo! And yet never in history was ever the opportunity so great as in the present war for a great amphibian operation in northern waters, and one so absolutely certain to end the War! But politicians have guided the War, and sent our Expeditionary Force, in August 1914, to France and Mons instead of to Antwerp and victory!

Fisher

July 30th, 1917

My dear Lord Fisher,

I have just received and read with the very greatest interest the letter you sent me by registered post . . . Your argument is clear and conclusive, and confirms me in the conviction that at the time I sent it my advice was sound.

No one can see you and enjoy your conversation for half an hour without being assured that the stories about your weakening of body or brain are false and malicious lies. I deplored the spreading of these stories, which I thought might gain some credence if you remained in the country and were not more often seen in public. I am convinced that by not employing your knowledge and experience, your brains and energy, to the fullest extent, the Government is depriving the country of services which would help it to win the war. At the time I spoke, it seemed to me that an opportunity might soon offer, and circumstances would permit of your being recalled to more active work, and to a post in which you could be more usefully employed. To my great regret the opportunity was not taken by the Prime Minister, and events appear to me to prove that a grave mistake was then made. Now the conditions are changed and are less propitious, and the only advice I can offer is in your own words: *'Keep fit.'* The war is not over and almost at any moment a public demand for your active assistance may arise. Be ready for the call. Also I recognize that now America has come into the war (and we might perhaps call upon Japan for her help) the additional material renders less necessary the length of time which was required to supply the force wanted for an amphibious operation such as you describe. It is possible therefore to formulate a plan for the use of naval forces which might be put into execution with very little delay, *if its originator was in a position to do so!* Therefore again I say: *'Be fit and be ready.'*

With every good wish, Yours sincerely,

Rosebery

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

439: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
August 1st, 1917

THE BATTLE OF THE NILE!

(Nelson has never yet had justice done to him for this splendid battle! The nearest attempt is by [Eliot] Warburton in *The Crescent and the Cross* [1845], now out of print, alas! but I am doing 'my little bit' for Nelson in my *Reminiscences*!)

My dear Lambert,

The above is a digression!

I enclose the copy of letter [No. 437] I spoke to you of. I have also sent a copy to 'K. J.' [Kennedy Jones], as he is a good friend! *But what's the good of it all?* The Tories are sworn not to have me back, and as you yourself were told by an eminent person, '*They would all resign*' were I replaced in power! But how small is my case as compared with the '*deep things*' of history!!! Please consider such quite recent instances as General Booth and Barnardo!¹ I look on those two men as perhaps the greatest saints the earth has produced, and yet they were both refused burial in Westminster Abbey! But they were each spontaneously followed to the grave by over a million mourners of the abject poor! Sir Henry Irving, the actor, who ran away with his friend's wife, he was allowed in at Westminster Abbey! Don't you think Jeremiah is alluding to such cases in his 51st chapter and the 56th verse: 'The Lord God of Recompense shall surely requite'!!!

Yours,

Fisher

440: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Knoll House
August 11th, 1917

My dear Lambert,

Here is bliss!!! Partly relieved by the Duchess breaking in wild horses! One of them kicked the front out of the pony (cart) last

¹ The Rev. William Booth ('General' Booth, d. 1912), founder of the Salvation Army; Thomas J. Barnardo (d. 1905), founder and director of the Barnardo Homes for orphans.

night, so it had to be tamed this morning and has just come back like a lamb in a sort of pedlar's van driven by the Duchess, so if my letter is a bit fluttered, it's due to having the nerve shook out of me!

Your letter to Geddes is just 'all right'!¹ What you say in it about the War to him *is precisely what Kennedy Jones said at lunch yesterday!* 'K. J.' says a revolution is sure in a few months in England, caused by want of cotton and other imports, and that there will be a clean sweep of all politicians, and he rather hopes that 'K. J.' and 'J. F.' may ride in as Cromwell and Ironsides! *What billet Lambert?* 'John Hampden', I think!!! (as he was the honestest man of the Cromwellian period!) The post goes in five minutes, so I must reserve for the next letter the quite wonderful things of secret history that 'K. J.' let out. Especially as regards Lloyd George, Bonar Law, and Northcliffe. (*Don't let him know, please!*) (He thinks that Lloyd George won't last 3 months, entirely due to his taking in Winston!²)

But this is only a small item of his interesting information. He has three oil wells in Roumania, and been there lately, and is fully informed. He thinks it's going to be a 7 years' war, unless we are licked in the meanwhile. He says '*he knows for sure*' that Germany can hold out except for FAT. (But I observed to him you can get fat out of oil, and they now have all the oil wells of Galicia and Roumania!) Also Roumania is the THIRD producing wheat country of the world!

He was wonderful, quite wonderful! I'm going to write it all down for you, the rest of it! He had 4 glasses of port.

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Sir Eric Geddes, Controller and a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty from May to July 1917, had become First Lord on July 18th (-1919), in succession to Carson, who entered the War Cabinet. Here are extracts from Lambert's letter of August 9th, summarizing a conversation with Geddes of the 8th (held on the latter's initiative): 'The decisive stroke that the Armies seem unable to strike can be struck by the Navy and must be, if we are to win. . . . The Germans are the attackers [at sea]. We are the defenders, yet we are 3½ to 4 to 1 in strength. We should attack the Germans either in the North Sea or the Baltic: there is the Achilles heel of Germany . . . the man for conceiving and executing such a strategy [is] Lord Fisher . . . You thought him too diffuse. I agree he is bubbling over with ideas - some of them seem mad, but he has proved to be right . . . I strongly urge you to put Lord Fisher in possession of all the facts affecting the Naval situation today. Ask him what he would do. If you approve of what he suggests, then put him in charge of the engine and clear the line.' Fisher sent copies of this letter to several friends, asking them to keep it 'secret'!

² In the Cabinet reshuffle of July 18th Churchill had become Minister of Munitions (-1918).

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

441: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Knoll House
August 13th, 1917

My dear Friend,

Here I am at the above address imbibing ozone and like Canute sitting on the sea shore vainly supposing that it is possible to order Providence to alter its decrees! (I got my new pair of shoes spoilt with salt water yesterday! I thought the tide was going out; it was coming in!)

No! It was foretold me by a 'wise woman' in 1903 that I should retire in 1910 (before I need have) and that there would be a Great War that would bring me back, and that I should after success have a fall! And it has come.

A Revolution is coming along and the new Cromwell may want me. It won't be want of food but want of cotton and other raw material that will cause the Revolution. The German restaurant train runs from Antwerp via Berlin to Constantinople, and thence to Baghdad shortly, as Falkenhayn, the best of the German Generals, has gone there to recapture it. The Germans have all in abundance, including men, and it will be a '*Seven Years War*'! (unless we are licked in the meanwhile!). Our one hope left is in the Air! If we dropped all else and concentrated on the Air, we should win!

The very best critic on the conduct of the War is a 'Student of War'. Read his article in the *Manchester Guardian* of August 4th, 1917.¹

In view of these terrible happenings it's idle to think of Osborne! And the son of the Great Crammer who engineered this treason has been supplanted by Sir R. Wemyss (the first Captain at Osborne) as Second Sea Lord, and Burney like Othello finds his occupation gone!²

Yours,

F.

¹ The article, 'A Week of the War', concluded: 'The net conclusion of recent operations is that we have made a fetish of numbers and of mere weight of material. . . . The victory in the war will have to be won by new ideas. . . . Merely to defend ourselves against his [the enemy's] submarine campaign is passive defence. The true defence is to raid his communications. By sea this is impossible, for he has no communications there to speak of.' Air raids on German military communications were the answer, for which purpose planes should be constructed 'on a scale hitherto undreamt of', and the air service become a separate arm of defence with its own ministry.

² The 'Son of the Great Crammer', whatever the exact meaning of the reference, was Admiral Burney. Succeeded as Second Sea Lord on August 7th by Vice-Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss (who was moved to the new post of Deputy First Sea Lord on September 27th), Burney became Commander-in-Chief, Rosyth (Coast of Scotland), 1917-1919. The Royal Naval College at Osborne, founded in 1906, when the scheme of general entry was introduced into the Navy, as a training college for naval cadets (their first two years),

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

442: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Knoll House
August 15th, 1917

My dear Lambert,

If you will please re-read the print I gave to Lord Cromer the day before I went before the Dardanelles Commission, I think you will admit that I DID make out an unanswerable case. Ernest McKenna,¹ who went through it a dozen times, said so to me. I have not a copy by me, but I know you have several. I consider it's quite the best thing I ever wrote in my life, but it was glossed over by Cromer and not printed by him, as it should have been. *He was a partisan of the worst type!* And the only three in the Commission who stood up to him were Andrew Fisher and the New Zealand High Commissioner and Roch, M.P., as to my appearances before the War Council. Balfour and Carson on both occasions clouded the issue by the red-herring trick of raising contentious details. The plain man has no chance against dialectical subtleties and cross-examining bluffing! I have great confidence in the masses of my countrymen shortly rising and sweeping out all these failures. The great words of Abraham Lincoln are apposite:

'You can fool all the people part of the time, you can fool a part of the people all the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time.'

Yours,

F.

¹ Ernest McKenna was Reginald McKenna's brother, a retired stockbroker, described by the family as a 'clever but lazy man'.

had been condemned by an Admiralty committee of medical men appointed in April. The Board had accepted (June 28th) the Committee's condemnation. It was rumoured that the establishment would be moved to and merged with the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, where the cadets spent their third and fourth years. It was, but not until 1921.

August 15th, 1917

My dear ———,
I am here,

‘The world forgetting,
By the world forgot’!¹

No, not quite!

‘The Tory “Old Gang” which meets in Belgrave Square has two particular aversions:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) Lord Fisher | } (What company I keep!) |
| (2) Mr. Churchill | |

and the solemn adjuration of both *precedes each meeting*’!

That is one of the Northcliffe papers [*Weekly Dispatch*] of August 12th! However, I am watching castles dug in the sand and trying to avoid building castles in the air as to how to finish the War.

I sent two letters to the Prime Minister, June 12th, 1917, and July 4th, 1917, but Mr. Lloyd George did not even signify their receipt. However, he read them out to the War Cabinet, Carson, Curzon, and Milner, who emphatically gave Mr. Lloyd George to understand they would resign were I called in! *Are they of the party who meet in Belgrave Square?*

But really why I am writing to you all of a sudden is that I have just read what the soldier said in the article headed: ‘What Mr. George might have said’. The soldier at the front says to the ‘Great Ones’, our Rulers: ‘Either give us peace, or else failing that *recognize* the fact that you are failures! Abdicate your titles; admit that you are no earthly use where you are, *AND LET THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN SAVE US HAVE A CHANCE.*’ Golden words! We are going to have a soldiers’ and workmen’s union *à la Russe*! . . .

The Germans are fit for a seven years’ war! — this is undoubted. ARE WE? Blunder after blunder is our record of the War, but, as the soldier says, Balfour and Lloyd George remain as directors of the

¹ How happy is the blameless vestal’s lot!

The world forgetting, by the world forgot . . .

Pope: ‘Eloisa to Abelard’ (1717), a favourite Fisher quotation during his first retirement period, 1910-1914.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

War. 'The Harvest is past, the Summer is ended and we are not saved.' *Jeremiah*, Chap. 8, Verse 20. And again Jeremiah says:

'A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land;
the prophets prophesy falsely and the people love to *have it so*:
and what will ye do in the end thereof?'

Is Mr. Snowden¹ going to be Robespierre? Is Mr. Smillie going to 'remove that bauble'?

Yours,

Fisher

444: TO A. G. GARDINER

August 17th, 1917

My dear Gardiner,

It is ages since I saw you or wrote to you! Yesterday arrived here a copy of *The Pillars of Society*, 4th edition (*so it is justly popular!*). But curiously enough another 'Pillars of Society' came by mistake, by Ibsen, '*Ghosts*', etc., so it came into my mind to suggest to you to write another splendid volume (as no other can write it) and call it '*Ghosts*'! (extensions of your former 'Character Sketches'), or perhaps '*Fallen Idols*' better!

Kitchener
Tirpitz
Fisher
Joffre

(You can select Generals as you like, and Politicians also!)

'*We have gone two miles!*' says Mr. Lloyd George at the Queen's Hall [August 4th]! This after 3 years' war! No Napoleon! is there? and no Pitt either! As the wounded soldier writes last week, 'failure everywhere', and he tells the 'Great Ones', as he calls our Rulers and Generals and Admirals, to clear out and let others have a chance who think they can save us! . . .

Yours,

Fisher

...

¹ Philip (afterwards first Viscount) Snowden, Chairman of the Independent Labour Party, 1917-1920, Labour M.P., 1906-1918, later Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1924, 1929-1931.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

445: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square

August 25th, 1917

Private

My dear Lambert,

I got an urgent telegram from Geddes asking me to lunch, so up I went, five hours by railway, and he was exceeding cordial, and five-sixths of the time was about his own business at the Admiralty, unfolding his schemes (WHICH DID NOT INCLUDE ME!! and were very remarkable), BUT Wemyss hasn't the brains for the job, nor the industry either! However, Geddes will find that out for himself. Geddes told me that Wemyss had been recommended to him by Jellicoe, Beatty, and Madden! MAY THE LORD HAVE MERCY ON THEIR SOULS! Well! I left Geddes at that, and then he gave one-sixth of his time to finding a billet for three men kicked out by Winston from the munitions, or rather, they resigned.¹...

In violent haste, Yours for evermore,

F.

I'm remaining on at Berkeley Square for the present, as Geddes wants me to go and dine with him again and asks me to fix a day and tell it to him.

¹ Sir Sothorn Holland, Sir H. Ross Skinner, and Captain (afterwards Sir) Alfred C. G. Egerton were the men in question. Holland and Skinner were attached to the B.I.R. on August 24th, 'to investigate how the work of the Board of Invention and Research can be further aided' (Geddes to Fisher, August 24th, 1917), with Egerton as their secretary. Captain Crease has written: 'In the autumn of 1917 it became increasingly obvious at the Admiralty that the Board of Invention and Research, as then constituted, could not satisfactorily carry out the functions for which it had been founded. It had always been looked upon by the Admiralty Departments concerned as an interloper, and had never been received with any cordiality, nor given the information and assistance or co-operation that were essential to its success. It was patent that no outside body could carry out the detailed investigations that new methods of warfare were continually necessitating.' The Holland Committee reached these conclusions on September 21st: '(a) That men of the greatest scientific knowledge are not being used to the fullest extent and are being wasted on Committee work. (b) That Board of Invention and Research does not work in sufficiently close touch with the Admiralty and *vice versa*. (c) That the scientists are not in and amongst the problems they work on. (d) That the present constitution of Board of Invention and Research does not admit of the individual driving power which is so necessary in all executive undertakings. (e) That the multiplication of experimental establishments by the Admiralty must lead to dissipation of forces and to confusion.' The Committee recommended the abolition of the B.I.R. and the appointment of a Director of Research and Experiment at the Admiralty, responsible for the direction of all research, inventions, and experiments, under the Third Sea Lord. Following upon this report, it was decided, with Fisher's entire concurrence, to abolish the B.I.R. and in lieu establish a Scientific Research Branch as an Admiralty Department. However, the B.I.R. continued to exist until the end of the war, but it now dealt only with what Wemyss called 'the outside mass of inventors'.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

Where is the Foreign Intelligence of the Admiralty? Admiral W. R. Hall boasted they knew all about the Turkish secrets before the Dardanelles Commission, and that we were close on victory! He's the champion liar of the British Navy! This is a nice 'show-up' of the Foreign Office!!!

[Attached newspaper cutting]

A very apt comment on the recent pronouncements of Mr. Balfour and Lord Hugh Cecil on the relations of democracy and diplomacy is provided by the Greek revelations in to-day's *Times*. It is now revealed that a few hours before we declared war on Germany she had concluded an alliance with Turkey, that the Greek Minister in Berlin was informed of the fact by the Kaiser, but that the British Foreign Office went on for three months treating the Turks as genuine neutrals. Mr. Balfour boasted on August 17th that our diplomatic business was far better done 'not by proclaiming our policy at Charing Cross but by confidential conversations with those who can convey views to other Governments'. We know now what these 'confidential communications' at Constantinople were worth in the months of August, September, and October 1914. Lord Hugh Cecil told us recently that: 'Labour is quite unfit mentally and by training to deal with the questions that will come under discussion.' Well, the diplomatic profession is the last preserve of aristocracy in the public service, the last calling for which a man may be chosen because his relatives are in 'Debrett'. If this Turkish fiasco is all that aristocracy can achieve, it is high time that democracy took a hand.

446: TO CAPTAIN THOMAS E. CREASE

August 29th, 1917

Dear Crease,

What do you think of enclosed? If you approve, you can seal it up and send on by hand to his house . . . Short and sweet is best, I think — one could easily write a lot!¹

Yours,

F.

¹ Crease did not approve! He had become Additional Private Secretary to the First Lord of the Admiralty, August 22nd (-1919).

August 29th, 1917

Private

Dear Sir Eric Geddes,

In continuation of your excellent exposition, no doubt you have it in mind that the Naval Intelligence Department now existing should be expanded to become your new 'Thinking Department', and were I in your place, I should put Crease in place of the present man (W. R. Hall), who has been there 3 years and wants a change badly! *New measures demand new men!* The Naval Intelligence Department should be thinking out the enemy's plans and what he is up to, and not hunting spies and interviewing journalists as its prime occupation. Presumably the First Sea Lord ought to be *the* 'Thinking Man'!

Yours truly,

Fisher

447: TO LORD RANKSBOROUGH

Ferne House

Donhead, Salisbury

September 2nd, 1917

My beloved Friend,

Your letter reached me here at the above address, where I risk my neck by the Duchess driving me about in a four in hand! It's a lovely place!

A. G. Gardiner of the *Daily News* (THE ABLEST LIVING JOURNALIST) told me before I left London that Lloyd George had been *tête-à-tête* with him, and his conclusion was that Lloyd George was in a tight place and in the complete grip of the Tories, and Gardiner was very sad and hopeless accordingly. I heard no more from Geddes, though he repeatedly said 'HE INTENDED SEEING ME AGAIN OFTEN'. As you truly say, life consists in being 'CARTED'!!!! I saw Rosebery before I left London. I was to have dined with him to meet Sir W. Robertson and drink his 1808 champagne, but Rosebery was 'took ill'. He wrote me a very emphatic letter!

Give my fond love to dear Louisa!

Yours till a cinder,

F.

...

36, Berkeley Square
September 10th, 1917

Dear Mr. Scott,

I return to the above address the day after to-morrow in case you happen to be in London. I think I sent you copies of my letters to the Prime Minister of June 12 and July 11. Events since those dates confirm all I wrote in those two letters. *THE AIRCRAFT NOW GOVERN THE WAR!* One very much authenticated story is that for 24 hours I was nominated as Air Minister and *The Times* had its leading article prepared, but at midnight of the day preceding its proposed insertion came a Government order that not a word was to be said! (*The above is very private, so please keep to yourself!*) But perhaps the most striking war event is that the German Fleet is careering about the Baltic, doing its own sweet will unmolested, and about to land a German army south of Reval and bring about the sea capture of the Russian capital, and yet we are five times stronger than our enemies at sea and look idly on while the Baltic is made a German lake!¹

Never in naval history has there been anything so supine and effete as the cotton-wool policy of our naval strategy in the last two years! But Press, Public, and Parliament all seem indifferent! The papers I wrote in November 1914 advocating advance along the Belgian coast with the recapture of Antwerp in association with the possession of the Baltic (*you have these prints*) are as forceful now *as the day they were written three years ago!* Well may A. G. Gardiner in his recent wonderful article in the *Daily News* put in italics: '*Are we using the right methods? Have we got the right men?*' As Winston says, none of our leaders talk the war language! The element of success in war is *SURPRISE*. To beget *SURPRISE* you must arrange for *IMAGINATION* to go to bed with *AUDACITY!* The first words Admiral von Spee said at the Battle of the Falkland Islands, when he saw the Big British Battle Cruisers that had come as from the sky on his doomed

¹ A similar letter to Churchill on September 9th added: 'This is "holding the ring" with a vengeance! Are we really incapable of a big enterprise? I hear of a new order of knighthood on the tapis - O.M.G. (Oh! My God!). Shower it on the Admiralty!!' Churchill replied on September 24th: 'You know how completely I share your views. . . . Do not lose heart. I still believe your work is not completed.' A half a dozen times during 1917 Churchill had written, urging him not to get downhearted - that he had a 'strange, recurrent feeling' that the Admiral would get another chance. 'Really,' Fisher had written Lambert on March 15th, 1917, 'Winston's letter is a very affectionate one that I got yesterday. I have a very weak spot for him in my heart.'

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fleet, were: 'Oh! what a SURPRISE!!!' and he turned and fled like King Ahaziah! And he and 3,000 German sailors and his Fleet were all sent to the bottom, and the British battle cruiser that did it had not one single man killed or wounded! *That was a surprise!* So would it have been a surprise for the Germans had the Government adopted my plans! The Baltic would have been ours, Antwerp regained, air raids rendered impossible, the submarine menace annihilated, and the Russian coast secure! And huge amphibian monsters (*impervious to submarine or gun*) ploughing their way in thousands like huge hippopotami across the North Sea and crawling impregnable up the beaches and so inland! But Providence has ordered otherwise, and the men of Gilead have not yet come for Jephthah! See the 11th Chapter of *Judges* and the 7th verse!

Yours,

Fisher

...

449: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
September 12th, 1917

Private

My dear Lambert,

Crease appears to be in the innermost circle now with Geddes, as Masterton-Smith has left the Admiralty, and Crease reigns in his stead!

SECRET. Crease says I shall be First Sea Lord before the year is out *if only I keep still!!!* (Do you notice everyone is ALWAYS telling me 'TO KEEP STILL'!) He says just now Wemyss is 'all the go'! But it will soon be found out that he has no brains! And then I shall be sent for!¹

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

¹ On the same, to McKenna on September 17th: 'So it's *faute de mieux!!!* Not very complimentary! *However, I don't believe it.*'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

450: FROM REGINALD MCKENNA

Minto House
Newquay, Cornwall
September 13th, 1917

My beloved Admiral,

You have far more energy than I; in other words, you are younger than 54. When I am in the country, as I am now in the remote wilds of Cornwall, I forget public affairs and leave the world to take care of itself. Your paper on the use of the Fleet has brought me back to life. But what is the good of having brilliant ideas if the powers that be have not the wit or courage to make use of them?

I don't like the French news and I like the Russian still less. Whatever you may say, America is not going to bring her Fleet over here. She would not like to end the war with nothing afloat while the Japanese Fleet remained untouched.

All is well with us. Pamela joins me in much love. The old P.M. [Asquith] has just left us. Among all the politicians he feels the conduct of A. J. B. [Balfour] more keenly than that of any other.¹

Ever your affectionate,

R. McK.

451: TO CECIL V. FISHER

36, Berkeley Square
October 7th, 1917

Dearest Cis,

Temperature	} All quite normal,
Pulse	
Tongue	

and though better, yet I am still yellow in the face. Mrs. Mason and the doctor say it will pass off. They've both had it badly, worse than me. I've never had it before. *Why now?* The moment I'm fit I'm off to Harrogate, still hoping to find a remnant of my five friends there,

¹ Fisher sent the letter on to Lambert (September 17th) with this comment: 'It's very interesting that Asquith hates Balfour more than Lloyd George!!! Also it's a good point about America fearing the Japanese. *The Japanese have leased a very wonderful harbour in Central America. An excellent base for Mexico!*' Lambert afterwards noted on a copy of the McKenna letter: 'McKenna's letter that Asquith felt Balfour's desertion the keenest. L.G. just before Asquith fell wanted to remove Balfour from Admiralty. Asquith would not consent.'

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

all extremely nice, two of them Rand millionaires and very interesting. *They do things so big!* Sent home 8 millions sterling of gold last year, and give their chemist £8,000 a year and drop the cyanide process for another, a little bit better only, at a cost of $\frac{1}{4}$ million sterling! . . .

The German October bombing beginning on October 24 is going to be the real thing. Probably several hundred will come over. It will be St. Luke's summer,¹ and it's folly for Mother to be here. No duty calls her!

For the first time, I think peace is likely (next spring). We have two inventions in my Board going to do the trick. **THIS IS PRIVATE.** Thousands and thousands under weigh. Also there are other contributory causes which I can't mention either. . . .

The moment peace is assured I am off to Vichy by the doctor's advice, and as I tell Mother, I intend henceforth to live from day to day, go anywhere for anytime, or more as we did from the Rigi [1895] at 5 minutes' notice. **NEVER HAVE A PLAN!** That's my idea of a happy end!

'All is well ended, if this suit be won,
That you express content'!

On August 24 last I had many hours with Sir Eric Geddes and persuaded him of the wicked delays there had been in pushing our vital anti-submarine inventions, and he agreed with me that drastic dealing is necessary, and it is about to come to pass exactly as I laid down after an exhaustive enquiry by Sir Sothern Holland and Sir H. Ross Skinner (my two millionaires!). But it means that I commit 'hara-kari', as the whole business will go inside the Admiralty, *where they won't have me, of course! The above is all private as yet.* . . .

Your loving father,

F.

452: TO ?

October 27th, 1917

My dear Friend,

You ask me to send you any 'points' for use next Thursday — **BUT IS IT ANY USE?** Nothing produces any effect! It's hopeless, as McKenna says, '*to fight a Government Department*'. They produce facts to

¹ That is, a late summer — at the end of October.

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support lies. There's the simple Big Certainty that over 60 German men-of-war and a huge fleet of German transports carrying a German Army have traversed the Baltic [the Riga expedition] from end to end with the British Fleet absolutely at rest and 5 times bigger than the German Fleet. At the very least, why was there no '*reconnaissance in force*' by our Fleet towards the Schillig Roads, where lay the remnant of the German Fleet — minesweepers and a barrage of submarines and flocks of destroyers covering our Fleet. There was no need of hurry — a slow, sure advance because the *denuded* German Fleet dare not emerge, and who knows what might not have been done! But you can't get up and say this! You would be told you don't know the facts! that if you thought the German Fleet was in the Baltic, you were greatly mistaken! Those were dummy wooden imitations up there, etc., etc. In fact you'd be told you were a d—d fool with only one idea in your head! — *to get Lord Fisher back!*¹ . . .

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

453: TO ?

36, Berkeley Square
October 28th, 1917

My dear Friend,

In continuation of my letter to you of yesterday's date, I draw your further attention to what is to me one of the most remarkable journalistic incidents of the present war in Sir W. Robertson Nicoll saying, in the present number of the *British Weekly* (a paper with a world-wide circulation) under his own signature, that some of those who know the working classes best are afraid of the appearance of a mob at Whitehall — *the precursor of a revolution!!!* Never existed more cautious Presbyterian Saint than Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, and for him to turn and rend Mr. Lloyd George as he does this week, and to say as he does this week, 'Disaster has followed disaster, and the explanation and promises EXTORTED from the Government are of very

¹ Further on the Riga theme, to an unnamed correspondent on November 5th: 'This morning I've had a letter from a "very high authority" in Russia, by a route which ensured its secrecy, to tell me that Russia is very likely to make a separate peace with Germany. Apparently immense resentment is felt in Russia at the powerful British Fleet . . . tamely remaining in apathy at the Orkney Islands while the German Fleet lands a German Army in the vicinity of Reval! *This resentment is justifiable!*'

little value', marks, in my mind, the approach of a big push by the people to get rid of the present directorship of the Tory triumvirate of Lord Milner, Sir Edward Carson, and Lord Curzon. (To say that Lloyd George is our ruler is really quite silly!) (He rings the bell when told! Certainly he rings it as if he did it on his own!)

I invite your attention also to the enclosed consummate argument by A. G. Gardiner in the *Daily News* of yesterday. *It is incomparable!*¹

A working engineer, one of Mr. Edison's right-hand men, told me the other day that he mixed very largely amongst the masses of working men, especially amongst the skilled mechanics, and that they intended a revolution — they hoped a bloodless one, but yet they meant a complete one! And 'No King and No Class'! No one to talk of 'my' Army and 'my' Navy and 'my' Empire. What they were going to have was a 'Commonwealth of Nations', and, like the Swiss Republic, the name of whose President we none of us ever know, each nation in turn would nominate some such innocuous prodigy as the Lord Mayor of London to sit at the head of the table for the year! No such autocrat would they have as the President of the United States.

However, this is the future! The present is that the mind of man can hardly conceive the crass stupidity of the hideous blunder which, in November 1914, ignored the Baltic project as set forth in print herewith, and, after approving it, cancelling the advance of the British Army along the Belgian coast in co-operation with the British Fleet for the gamble of the Dardanelles! Almost as big a blunder as that original crime of sending our Army to France instead of to Antwerp, which then never would have been captured by the Germans and would have ended the war in conjunction with the Baltic scheme, for which we built that unparalleled Armada of 612 vessels in 11 months! . . .

Yours,

F.

Postscript. . . . Those 80,000 Italian prisoners and 800 heavy guns captured by the Germans, brought from Russian frontier under Mackensen, is the result of the British Fleet not being in the Baltic, as it might have been in July 1915 (and arranged for!). Even now it can be done!! (The mandarins say it can't!) An Engineer in Ceylon I heard of went

¹ 'The Present Discontents', concerning the reasons for public discontent with the Government: the repeated assurances of Lloyd George that the submarine menace was under control, the chaos in Government departments, the lack of continuity in governmental action, etc.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

to his Chief and said the making of the new railway was impracticable owing to the rivers so torrential and the rocks so precipitous! The answer was: '*D—n the rivers*' and '*blast the rocks*'!

454: TO THE DUCHESS OF HAMILTON

[early November 1917]

... *We've got to live from day to day!* It's the oldest lesson in the world and yet we never learn it! We don't make enough of the Lord's Prayer! 'Give us THIS DAY our daily bread' — not for tomorrow even, *let alone the future*, only our bread for *this to-day*. Yet the Almighty has planted in us as a most righteous plant (*that grows like horse-radish and spreads like Jerusalem artichokes*), the ever effervescing delight of 'ANTICIPATION'!!!! Like the rich man (*whose soul was required of him that very night!*) we are always in anticipation building barns to hold more riches! The golden sands of Samoa! The grandeur of the Siena sunset, the magnificence of Dawn and Twilight in the Michelangelo Chapel! The Heavenly Partnership! Good Health!

And yet what is the right attitude? The only attitude? 'Thy will be done'!

'Seek we no more

content with these.

Let present Rapture, Comfort, Ease

as Heaven shall bid them come and go.

The secret this of rest below!

Some Holy Saint (I think Bishop Jeremy Taylor) said, learn a lot of hymns, good hymns, and they'll solace you when dying! 'And let the music of Thy name refresh my soul in death.' . . .

455: TO LADY PHYLLIS HERVEY¹

36, Berkeley Square
November 3rd, 1917

My dear Phyllis,

What an indifferent sort of godfather I am! You'll only ever think of me in terms of chocolate, but, really, what I am sending you (by

¹ Afterwards Lady Phyllis MacRae; younger daughter (aged seventeen) of Rear-Admiral the fourth Marquess of Bristol and god-daughter of Lord Fisher.

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parcel post) is I think rather out of the common! *Enjoy it, don't give it away!*

My fond love to your dear mother and father and sister, etc. I really must endeavour next time you're in London to ask you about the Church Catechism and take an interest in your going to Heaven! and ask you to read the *Map of Life* by Mr. Lecky,¹ with marked passages.

If it hadn't been for my finding this chocolate, I shouldn't have thought about you and Heaven!

The Mikado has sent me a flower! I've not yet got it!²

Yours affectionately,

Fisher

I've got a half-penny postcard bought by a friend from a shop window in Cheltenham. I'll give it to you if I can find it, as it is so good for one half-penny — beautifully coloured!

456: TO SIR FREDERICK TREVES

36, Berkeley Square
November 7th, 1917

My beloved Friend,

You saved my life! Those (six surgical) demons on October 10 last were dead on for an operation! and when you were pursued to the Red Cross, '*you withstood them to the face*' when the operation was collectively urged on you by an emissary from this great medical assembly! This bowl I send you is a replica of what I gave King Edward, and he much used it. I found the original black as ink from age and neglect, as part of a sale of a palace in Cordova. It is intended for holy water to exorcize the Devil! So it is peculiarly appropriate as my signal to you of endless gratitude, for you kept those Devils away who pined to play at hide and seek with my inside! Nevertheless, I do see that three weeks complete stoppage of the bile was terrifying, but that only adds to your glory!

My fond love to Lady Treves.

Yours till Hell freezes,

Fisher

¹ See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 339.

² He was referring to the Order of the Rising Sun (chrysanthemum design). 'I think it should have been the "Fallen Star"!' he had written Moresby on September 22nd.

Empire Hotel
Bath

[November 30th, 1917]

My dear Lambert,

You don't tell me what Sir C. Cust said to Ranksborough that so disturbed him!¹ Cust sways the little knock-kneed 'Futile', and Lady Eva Dugdale² sways 'Fertile'! That's how we are ruled! We want Oliver Cromwell badly, and now Lansdowne is Massingham's partner,³ and we are going to lose the War in Coventry because no one has sense enough to remove a just grievance quickly!⁴ '*Bis dat qui cito dat*'!⁵ Perhaps they are waiting for Lloyd George to go down to Coventry, and agree to everything (*more suo*, as the Latin Grammar says!). You won't finish this war until you get rid of MEDIOCRITY and put in GENIUS! Lloyd George has all the sparkles for selecting, but not the backbone to do it, except with Winston, who probably did it himself. Anyway it is as you say in your letter just come that all is just as bad as bad can be. The submarine menace is not being anticipated by us in regard to the big type the Germans are producing. What steps are being taken by the Admiralty to deal with these whoppers when shortly they stop our nitrate trade round the Horn and our Indian Ocean traffic! Alas! Alas! '*The war is almost won*' is the only answer we get from the First Sea Lord, or 'We hold the ring'.

Yours,

F.

¹ 'Poor Ranksboro' came into the Lobby last night and was greatly excited that Cust had spoken to him about you. I gave him a few facts, but he can't use them, but wound up by saying, "Tell George Five from me that unless he gets Fisher back or a change somewhere, Buckingham Palace will go bust".' (Lambert to Fisher, November 29th, 1917).

² Lady Eva Dugdale, a Woman of the Bedchamber in Queen Mary's household.

³ The Fifth Marquess of Lansdowne, onetime Conservative Foreign Secretary (1900-1905), had published in the *Daily Telegraph* of November 29th a letter outlining possible peace terms (e.g. that Britain did not wish the annihilation of Germany as a great power). This famous letter led to his repudiation by the Government, his party, and the press. Massingham had just put Lansdowne forward in *The Nation* as an appropriate Prime Minister in place of Lloyd George.

⁴ Fifty thousand Coventry airplane and munition workers had gone on strike on November 26th over the problem of the recognition of shop stewards. The strike was settled on December 2nd.

⁵ 'He gives twice who gives soon', attributed to Publilius Syrus (first century B.C.).

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458: FROM REAR-ADMIRAL CECIL F. LAMBERT¹

December 12th, 1917

Private and Confidential

Dear Lord Fisher,

In the late action in the Heligoland Bight [November 16th-17th] the only heavy ships which could get up with the enemy were the *Repulse*, *Courageous*, and *Glorious* (the *Renown* and *Furious* were elsewhere). They very nearly brought off an important 'coup'! Without them our light cruisers would not have had a 'look in' or perhaps would have been 'done in'! When public speakers desired to decry the work of the Board of which you were a member in 1914 and 1915, and particularly that part of the work for which you were so personally responsible as this new type of heavy ship, no condemnation was too heavy to heap on your design! It is a pleasure to me, therefore, to be able to let you know that they have fully justified your anticipation of their success.

I trust you are quite well and will believe me,

Yours sincerely,

Cecil Lambert

459: TO ?

December 13th, 1917

My dear —,

I'm so glad you sent me Hansard! HOW SAD THAT SUCH WORDS AS YOU SPOKE DON'T GET REPORTED! Sir Ivor Philipps² saying the Navy is a 'SUBSIDIARY' Service so aptly demonstrates the depth the Admiralty have sunk to in their apathetic strategy!

THE REAL OFFENDER IS MR. BALFOUR! Sir H. Jackson had no word to say, I know — and so the 'cotton wool' strategy got established, and someone writes me yesterday that the Yankees ain't going to stand it and are going to take charge of the naval strategy of the War. This, combined with an approaching French Generalissimo in supreme

¹ Lambert was commanding the 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron, Grand Fleet, 1916-1918. Fisher noted on this letter: 'Ever since their production [his five battle cruisers] became known, very stupid naval critics in both Houses of Parliament [elsewhere he cites by name Meux and Beresford] (quite ignorant of new naval strategical and tactical requirements) have consistently crabbed these new mighty engines of war as the emanations of a sick brain, "*senile and autocratic*"! Hence the value of this following letter from Admiral Lambert just received.'

² Major-General (ret.) Sir Ivor Philipps, Liberal M.P., 1906-1922.

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command of the War in France and elsewhere, will be a nice ending to the biggest farce ever enacted in human history by having Lord Milner, Lord Curzon, and Sir E. Carson and Mr. Barnes¹ to direct the War!!! IT IS ALL REALLY TERRIBLE!!! But, as I keep on telling you and as Lady Radnor reminded me yesterday, we are the lost Ten Tribes and so get wonderfully befriended! Just consider the morning lesson for December 8!! (the 31st Chapter of *Isaiah* and the 4th and 5th verses). I suppose that date of December 8th was exactly when we surrounded Jerusalem and our aircraft were flying over it! *And we didn't fire a single shot into the Holy City!* (so the *news-papers* say). 'The Lord of Hosts shall come down to fight for Mount Zion and for THE HILL THEREOF' (we were on the height commanding the City). 'As *birds flying* so will the Lord of Hosts defend Jerusalem' (Isaiah didn't know about aeroplanes!); 'defending also he will *deliver* it; and passing over he will *preserve* it.' (No injury was done to the City.)

Yours,

F.

460: TO QUEEN ALEXANDRA

36, Berkeley Square
December 19th, 1917

Private and Confidential

Lord Fisher, just returned cured from Bath, presents his humble duty and finds two lovely lions² sent him by Her Majesty, and he yet hopes to see an English Army land in Schleswig-Holstein to restore that country to Denmark. It's the indelible disgrace to the British Lion allowing the German Jackal (that sad time long ago) to take a base advantage of the Danish Lion, when every sense of honour bound England to help Denmark. England has been well and deservedly punished for this.

There is yet time to reconquer Schleswig-Holstein and the Kiel Canal. It could be done now! I guarantee I could do it! But there is neither audacity or imagination amongst our leaders. *We are lions led by asses!*

I remain, Your Majesty's humble and affectionate admirer,
Fisher

¹ George N. Barnes, Pensions Minister, 1916-1918, and member of the War Cabinet, 1917.

² Two beautiful models of lions, one the British lion and the other the Danish lion.

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461: FROM H. W. WILSON

203, Elgin Avenue, W.
December 20th, 1917

Dear Lord Fisher,

I am much interested in the extract which you have so kindly sent me, and it coincides exactly with the judgment of one of the ablest naval officers with whom I talked. The officer in question, Captain H. W. Richmond,¹ said to me at Scapa this year: 'The freak ships for which he (Lord Fisher) has been much abused were built for a special purpose. I do not for one moment share the view that they are failures, nor do the people in charge of them.' I may add that I confirmed this opinion at Rosyth on a visit to these very mystery ships, when I found that their officers and men had a complete belief in them.

This is the evidence of an unbiased witness, for as you know in the past I never hesitated to attack your administration when I thought it was wrong. It is my belief to-day that it is a grave misfortune for our country that you are not in power, for I judge your war policy not by words, or by a past which perhaps both of us would rather forget, but by its actual achievements — the Battle of the Falklands, for which also Richmond had the warmest praise, so far as the execution of the strategical move (which was Sturdee's) was concerned; and by the decision and energy with which you carried out a vast programme adopted for a specific military purpose, which seems to me to have been thoroughly sound.

I have worked my hardest to eliminate the old bitternesses and get an administration of all the talents with you at its head,² but, as you know, I have failed, not through any fault of your own, but because, even in these terrible days, men think rather of their petty animosities than of their country.

No one can feel the smallest confidence in the present Admiralty. If it does not fall soon, it will bring down our country with it. You alone among the senior admirals seem to me to be penetrated with the offensive spirit. I have never considered you as really at fault in the Dardanelles business, except perhaps in not overriding Kitchener, though that is a human mistake which, in view of all the circum-

¹ Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Herbert W. Richmond, commanding the dreadnought *Conqueror*, 2nd Battle Squadron, Grand Fleet, 1917.

² Wilson had even tried to enlist the support of the D.N.I., Hall, hardly a Fisher enthusiast, in his campaign to get the old sea-dog back to the Admiralty. See James: *The Eyes of the Navy*, pp. 87-8.

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stances, any one of us — even the youngest and most cocksure — might in the circumstances have committed.

I hope you will pardon me for speaking quite sincerely and accept my best wishes for the coming year.

Yours sincerely,

Herbt. W. Wilson

462: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

[December 21st, 1917]

Friday, 4 A.M.!!!

My beloved Friend,

I woke up with these words of yours last night, which greatly impressed me: 'Lloyd George can't do now what he could have done a little while ago'! *His power is slipping from him!* And the Bully Carson dominates the Country! (I believe he's the head of the propaganda.) Hurd, of the *Daily Telegraph*, so I heard last night (after you left me), is a paid servant of this propaganda! I was told his (Hurd's) article on the destruction of the convoy recently [the Scandinavian Convoy, December 11th-12th] by the German destroyers was absolutely farcical! Also his quotation yesterday of Jellicoe's assertions is grossly garbled and distorted in its context. Jellicoe was a Lord of the Admiralty Board that stopped my progressive policy of building submarines. That policy I left behind me in January 1910, when I left the Admiralty. There were actually fewer submarines when I returned to the Admiralty in October 1914 than when I left in January 1910! *Why does not Hurd gibbet A. K. Wilson and every Sea Lord that was at the Admiralty between January 1910 and October 1914?* That's the damnable journalistic lying which plays hell with the Public. I had a letter from Hurd only a short time since to say he was sticking to his never faltering support of all my policy!!! . . .

Do you see the *Daily Express* and *Globe* gave prominence to your quotation of my letter in your excellent speech on vote of credit.¹

¹ Lambert had quoted, in a Commons speech on December 13th, a letter from Fisher to the Admiralty of March 28th, 1917. I have not found such a letter, but the text is very similar to the first paragraph in a letter of the same date to the Prime Minister: No. 414, above. Lambert's reference, Bacon has written, 'created quite a sensation. More than one Member began seriously to consider whether Lord Fisher's prophetic instincts were not of value to the nation and had not been wasted by his enforced retirement' (*Fisher*, II, 297).

I don't know that any other paper did so! And yet both *Daily Express* and *Globe* are Tory 'out-and-out'!!

Captain Buller came here after you left last night. He is Naval Secretary to the Second Sea Lord. He said Lionel Halsey, who is Third Sea Lord, burst into his room last night and said he had just met me and I had said that not a soul in the Admiralty — NOT ONE — had the courage of a louse or the backbone of a slug!!! And that he, Halsey, had never before seen me look so young and well! That I had quite a 'young figure'! Well! Considering I am 7 (seven) inches less round the waist, I should rather think I had a '*young figure*'! But not being a woman (and so wearing corsets) I prefer my previous girth! Buller said it flew like wild-fire all over the Admiralty, what I had said to Halsey! and quite a sensation at my being rejuvenated!

So do you still think that Geddes won't get rid of me (?), as Crease told me the night before last '*that I was going*'! and I had better 'go to Kilverstone, and so prevent people saying I was intriguing'!

You ought to repeat this newspaper extract herewith¹ *over and over and over again* — in every speech and everywhere! Repetition is the soul of journalism! IT WOULD CATCH ON!!!! Write a letter to *The Times*. Surely *The Times* will support Prothero!

You have somewhere a printed statement in an extract from 'War Council Minutes' that I informed Lord Kitchener, in October 1914, from my 3 years' experience as Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, that 'BULGARIA WAS THE KEY OF THE WAR'!, and that the Bulgarians were savages and real fighters, whereas the Servians were poltroons. I told all this to Kitchener and also Sir Edward Grey, *but they paid no heed!*

Don't imagine my letter to Queen Alexandra is bombast! I would guarantee to do what I say in that letter to Her Majesty, but the Military would have to 'cave in' to my views and make Schleswig-Holstein and the Kiel Canal their objective, and so get behind the enemy and necessitate the evacuation of Belgium! *My amphibian Hippopotami would do the trick!* I could build a thousand in 5 months — we have the steel and we have the men. They would paddle with four oil engines each of them across the North Sea in any gale,

¹ R. E. Prothero, President of the Board of Agriculture, at Aylesbury on December 15th: 'We should be hard put to it to get through the year up to the next harvest — probably so pushed that we should be obliged to cut off the supplies of corn to all animals except the horses actually in work and the cows actually in milk. Yesterday it was announced that the Government are going to permit winter racing with a 15-lb. daily oat ration for the horses. There are two classes of peoples who have not yet failed to squeeze this Government — *the brewers and the race-horse owners*' (italics Fisher's).

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however fierce! impenetrable to gunfire, immune to the submarine, holding 500 men each, and would crawl up the Schleswig-Holstein beaches and travel over every sort of d—d obstruction that German ingenuity could devise! Alas! Alas! An exile and an outcast!

Yours,

F.

463: TO JOHN BURNS

36, Berkeley Square
December 21st, 1917

My dear Fellow-Labourer!

That's what you used to call me! I immensely appreciate your excellent letter and *its transcendent enclosure!!!*

'Partial Firing continued until 4.30 p.m., when, a victory having been reported to the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Nelson (R.N. and Commander-in-Chief), he THEN died of his wound'!

AN IMMORTAL EPITAPH!! Having done his job, he went to Heaven in glory like Elijah with his chariots and horses of fire — at the very zenith they went of both their glories!

When '*the Meditations of Lord Fisher*' are published, I hope you'll buy a copy! I've written about Nelson what no man knows! It will lift your soul! He was out and away the greatest man who ever lived, but the common people don't know about him as they should! An old woman in an omnibus passing through Trafalgar Square asked: 'What are them lions a-guarding of?' (She was eating a penny bun.) My remark was: 'That bun would have cost you threepence but for the man they are guarding'! As for his friendship with Lady Hamilton! IT WAS SPLENDID! IT WAS NATURAL. IT WAS NOBLE AND HONEST!

The woman, full of tenderness and marvellous sympathy, nursed his wounded frame and fragile body, always racked with unceasing pain from what they then called 'tic-douloureux'. We now call it 'neuritis', I believe. He had returned to Naples from his great victory of the Nile, his Fleet urgently in need of stores and provisions, which the filthy Italians refused him. She bastinadoed the King with her tongue and got the Fleet ready for sea! provisioned, stored,

equipped! And so Nelson's heart was hers! *'If there were more Emmas, there would be more Nelsons!'* His own wife — a sad, youthful, indiscreet marriage — was an iceberg! Cold and unsympathetic and barren! And lastly she (Lady Hamilton) sent him to Trafalgar, against all her own interests and affection, when his fragile body, racked with pain, clamoured for rest with her! But her entreaties prevailed, and he joined Elijah and Moses! (for Nelson's 'eye was not dim nor his natural force abated' when he joined those two in the skies!) You know the incomparable scene depicted in the Gospels, and the Saviour's marvellous words: *'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.'* But wait and see 'Lord Fisher's Meditations' for the rest of Nelson. . . .

Yours,

Fisher

464: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Christmas Day [1917]

My dear Lambert,

Bless you for your admirable letter as to the War and Lloyd George and the 'triumvirate of ignorance' (Carson, Curzon, and Milner), but I bless you more for your valued words about myself!

Yesterday the Duke of Buccleuch paid me a long visit. Like [the Duke of] Hamilton, his first remembrance of me was as a Midshipman. (So he always sits on the edge of his chair while he's talking to me! *Wonderful thing is that terror of discipline as a little boy!* You don't find it in the Army! I said 'Sir' to the Governor of the Naval Prison at Malta, though I was the Commander-in-Chief and he still a Commander, as he was when he bullied me in my first ship!) But to return to Buccleuch. He came specially to talk to me of the War! Though a blue Tory, *he is aghast at the continuance of Balfour in the Government!* and the influence of Lord Robert Cecil! whom he knows well and says he's only fit to argue a High Church ritual case in the Ecclesiastical Court, and a bent of mind totally unfit for a Foreign Office director! Buccleuch sees *'no way out'* himself except a revolution! For an 'out-and-out' Tory to make this admission shows the horizon to be black with woe. (However, he brought me four woodcock to palliate the agony of despondency!) . . .

If a man such as he is, who has been Chairman of the North British

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Railway (till he succeeded to the Dukedom) and got that Railway out of bankruptcy, who is Chairman of the Navy League and President of the Society of Naval Architects, and has great possessions of his own, were to get up in his place in the House of Lords and say to them what he said to me about his brother Tories in the Government (and *especially Balfour*) and his exasperation of the ignominious handling of our incomparable Navy — he having no possible advantage whatever to gain by his abuse and just damnation of the conduct of the War, such as would be quite humanly attributed to any attack made by me — then I tell him he'd 'sweep the floor'! and when Smillie comes along presently as Cromwell, he (Buccleuch) will be allowed to keep his head on and to keep his Scotch moors!

I hear from an absolutely reliable source that Jellicoe and Beatty are again at daggers drawn and that Geddes has asked Lloyd George to allow him (Geddes) to vacate the Admiralty and go back to his billet in France as Head of the Transportation Department (which has 'bust up' since he (Geddes) left it!). He told this friend that he just can't do anything at the Admiralty, *as he is out of his depth!* and *Carson clings to Jellicoe!* Lloyd George is trying to avoid wrecking himself and is wrecking his Country by not taking the bold plunge of dismissing the ASSES who are professionally responsible for the War being now in its fourth year with every prospect of our losing it! Of course Gardiner praising me in his big article in the *Daily News* of Saturday last, 22nd December, has done me no good!

I had no intention of writing you so much! As Shakespeare says in *Hamlet*:

'O, cursed spite!
The time is out of joint!'

Best love to the Prophetess! Does she still think an ignoble peace is very near at hand? The common people would make peace tomorrow if a General Election gives them power!

Yours till death,

F.

P.S. I have another Duke on hand (Westminster), equally affectionate and wanting me back as Dictator! What a lark if he seconded Buccleuch in the House of Lords!

36, Berkeley Square
December 29th, 1917

My dear Friend,

Last night Mr. Buckle (late Editor of *The Times*) stopped me in the street (I didn't recognize him! He has wasted to a shadow!) and said the new First Sea Lord¹ is a great-grandson of William the Fourth by Mrs. Jordan the actress, and he is third cousin to the King and went round the world with His Majesty, and took the Duke of Connaught to South Africa as Captain of the *Ophir*, and he evacuated Gallipoli with much kudos from Sir Charles Monro, the General-in-Command. BUT HAS HE BRAINS?? I gave Buckle an evasive answer! I replied, '*He has tact!*' For when I started the new scheme of education in the Navy (whereby the '*engineer*' was exalted and the '*wind-man*' was abased!), I exercised a low form of cunning and selected Wemyss before all others to be the first Captain of the new educational establishment at Osborne, and splendidly did he 'oil the machine'! And the Balaks, the sons of Zippor, who had trusted in him to curse me, found him to be even as Balaam the son of Beor! In fact, dear friend! I might parody the 'All-Highest' and say: '*God was on my side*'! for even the dumb ass spoke on my behalf!

But the '*unexpected happens in war*', and Wemyss' tact may accomplish a success! Hitherto 'the vision' has been denied us both by sea and land! There has been no 'surprise' for the Germans with the sole exception of the annihilation of Admiral von Spee's fine Squadron off the Falklands! But you can only beget '*surprise*' by '*audacity*' going to bed with '*imagination*', and the result of the copulation is 'surprise'! And 'surprise' is the secret of war!

Every drawing-room in London knows when the next 'great push' is to be! Where the Germans want us to attack — *there we go!* We don't concentrate in the decisive theatre of the War! We learnt nothing from Frederick the Great as to the Baltic being the sole weak spot of Germany, and he sent for a bottle of poison when the Russian Army was going to march from a disembarkation on the Pomeranian Coast to Berlin, only 82 miles off!

Long before the War, the German Emperor said I was the most dangerous enemy of Germany, because he knew I had an eye on the Pomeranian coast! He told Beit this!² ('Wernher, Beit & Co.', diamond merchants, and Rhodes' partner!)

¹ Wemyss had succeeded Jellicoe on December 26th and served until November 1919.

² See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 146.

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And even so late as recently, when the German Army was taken in a vast fleet of German transports from Kiel to Riga, there was momentarily a magnificent and sure opportunity of destroying the Kiel Canal and wrecking therein the denuded German Fleet (which would have taken refuge therein), and our landing half a million men in Danish Schleswig-Holstein (where the Germans are hated), seizing the North Sea Baltic entrance, and marching on Kiel! But there was no 'VISION' accorded us! though even the 'wayfaring men, though fools, did not err therein' as to its pure feasibility! My plan was perfected, precise, and certainly peculiar! But it wanted the 'planner' to execute it! Do you remember the classic words of Mr. Burke in the greatest portion of his greatest oration in the House of Commons? 'I have no faith in any scheme of war in which the plan is divorced from the execution.'

Yours till death,

Fisher

P.S. '*Resurgam*'!

466: TO H. W. WILSON

36, Berkeley Square
December 31st, 1917

Private and Confidential

My dear Wilson,

This very moment has caught my eye your forcible and terse remark at bottom of page 27 of the *Daily Mail Year Book* for 1918: 'The special warships built by Lord Fisher before he resigned (May 22nd, 1915) were notoriously constructed for the special conditions of a large scale Naval offensive, but were not used for that purpose by his successors.' *It is good of you to have emphasized this!* . . .

I am going to have my 'Meditations' privately printed at once. Most autobiographies begin with date of birth, when weaned, silly stories of when a little boy, and so on. I've begun at the other end and work backwards, and finish up with the incident of my refusing to be weaned at 9 months, and I triumphed, and my mother, a splendid six-foot Juno of sixteen or thereabouts, fed me for months after! I rather think Sir Bertrand Dawson attributes my present vitality to the early good feeding I had!

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Heaven bless you, and let us thank God that Tirpitz remains disgraced. Von Capelle, his successor, is a weak ass!

Yours,

Fisher

Either peace is very near us now, or else Richard Smillie, miners' delegate, will be 'Cromwell' and clear out an effete Parliament! This day's Psalms:

'Let the praises of God be in his mouth and a two-edged sword in his hand to be avenged of the heathen and to rebuke the people.

'To bind their Kings in chains, and their Nobles with links of iron.'

(What an awful mess our Foreign Office made of the Russian Revolution! It was our weapon, and we cast it away.)

467: TO ?

[1918]

You ask for information in regard to a prophecy I made before the War in relation to submarines, because you say that my statement made in 1912 that submarines would utterly change Naval Warfare is now making a stir. However, I made that same statement in 1904, fourteen years ago, and I print in this volume a copy of it.

I will endeavour to give you a brief, but succinct, synopsis of the whole matter. I have to go some way back, but, as you quite correctly surmise, the culmination of my beliefs since 1902 was the paper on Submarine Warfare which I prepared six months before the War. It was printed in January 1914. I refer therein, in a postscript, to Admiral Togo sinking 2,000 Chinese soldiers in an English steamer before the declaration of war between China and Japan. I refer secondly in that postscript to the Japanese General Nogi, in regard to prisoners, and I refer thirdly to the Russian General Skobelev, who massacred every man, woman and child at Geok-Tepe [1881], in Turkestan. I said in my Memorandum that the Germans would similarly sink our merchant ships and their innocent passengers without warning, quite regardless of any feelings of humanity. So they did.

In May 1912 (I am working backwards), Mr. Asquith, the Prime Minister, and Mr. Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, came to Naples, where I then was, and I was invited to be Chairman of a Royal Commission on Oil Fuel for the Navy, and on Oil Engines. What most moved me to acceptance was to push the submarine, because oil and the oil engine had a special bearing on its development.

Continuing my march backwards in regard to the submarine, there was a cessation in the development of the submarine after I left the Admiralty as First Sea Lord on January 25th, 1910. When I returned as First Sea Lord to the Admiralty in October, 1914, there were fewer submarines than when I left the Admiralty in January 1910, and the one man incomparably fitted to develop the submarine had been cast away in a third-class cruiser stationed in Crete. No wonder! An Admiral holding a very high appointment afloat derided submarines as playthings!

In one set of manœuvres the young officer commanding a submarine, having for the third time successfully torpedoed the hostile Admiral's Flagship, the young officer humbly said so to the Admiral by signal, and suggested the Flagship going out of action. The answer he got back by signal from the Admiral was: 'You be damned!'

I am still going on tracing back the submarine. In 1907, King Edward went on board the *Dreadnought* for a cruise and witnessed the manœuvres of a Submarine Flotilla. I then said to His Majesty: 'The submarine will be the battleship of the future!' It appears that someone who heard this repeated it, and a copy appeared in *Truth*. As there are now submarines carrying 12 in. guns, that prophecy is getting realized.

In February 1904, Admiral Count Montecuccoli, the Austrian Minister of Marine, invited himself to stay with me at Portsmouth, where I was then Commander-in-Chief. He had been Commander-in-Chief of the Austrian Navy at Pola when I was Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean. We became very great friends out there. The Austrian Fleet gave us a most cordial reception. He also was an ardent believer in the submarine. That's why he invited himself to stay, but I refused to let him see our submarines at Portsmouth, which were then advancing by leaps and bounds. Admiral Bacon was then the admirable Captain in charge of submarines, and he did more to develop the submarine than anyone living. The submarine is not the weapon of the weak. Had it only

been properly used and developed, it's the weapon of the strong, if you use your Naval Supremacy properly, and SEIZE THE EXITS OF THE ENEMY, AND MAKE A BLOCKADE EFFECTUAL BY SUBMARINES AND MINES, WHICH OUR PREDOMINANT AND OVERWHELMING NAVAL SUPERIORITY RENDERS FEASIBLE.

In an essay by Admiral Schleinitz in 1908, and in 1907 by Vice-Admiral Galster, both of the German Navy, it is stated that there was not a single German submarine launched in 1907, and that one was launched in 1908, two in 1909, and four in 1910. The British Navy, when I left the Admiralty on January 25th, 1910, had 60 submarines completed or completing. All that was required to meet a German Submarine Menace was the possession of Antwerp, the Belgian Coast, and the Baltic. We could quite easily have accomplished these three objects.

‘We had the Ships,
We had the Men,
And we had the Money too.’

In this war, as regards any co-operation of the BRITISH ARMY WITH THE BRITISH NAVY, THE BRITISH ARMY MIGHT HAVE BEEN IN TIMBUCTOO. I printed this statement in the first three months of the War to emphasize that British strategy should be founded on the Army being a projectile to be fired by the Navy. SUBMITTED FOR CONSIDERATION IN 1914, AT THE VERY COMMENCEMENT OF THE WAR.

UP TO THE PRESENT NO CLEAR STATEMENT HAS BEEN MADE AS TO WHAT OUR NAVAL POLICY IN THIS WAR IS TO BE. SOME STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE APPEARS A FUNDAMENTAL NECESSITY TO ANY DECISION IN REGARD TO NAVAL ACTION AGAINST COAST FORTIFICATIONS.

TO CUT OFF THE ENEMY'S TRADE, WE OUGHT TO AIM AT A COMPLETE CLOSING OF THE NORTH SEA BY SOWING IT WITH MINES, AND THE DECLARATION OF A BLOCKADE.

WE PLAY INTO GERMANY'S HANDS IF WE RISK FIGHTING SHIPS IN ANY SUBSIDIARY OPERATIONS SUCH AS COASTAL BOMBARDMENTS OR THE ATTACK OF FORTIFIED PLACES, WITHOUT MILITARY CO-OPERATION, for we hereby increase the possibility that the Germans may be able to engage our Fleet with some approach to equality of strength. It is the policy of Germany to avoid a decision at sea and to keep the command in dispute as long as possible while they concentrate their offensive powers on the army ashore. Their defensive attitude has been adopted deliberately, notwithstanding that it has involved the sacrifice of the whole of the German mercantile shipping and oversea

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trade, and has subjected Germany for six months to the whole pressure of our sea power. This tremendous sacrifice has been imposed on Germany by two causes: first, by her numerical inferiority to our Fleet; and, second, because an unsuccessful action and the destruction of the High Sea Fleet might place Germany in a position of naval inferiority to Russia and EXPOSE THE BALTIC COAST TO INVASION; AND SINCE THE TIME OF FREDERICK THE GREAT GERMANY HAS ALWAYS BEEN NERVOUS OF THIS FLANK.

468: TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

36, Berkeley Square
January 3rd, 1918
4 a.m.!

Private and Confidential

My beloved Hankey,

I have been awake an hour cogitating over your kind and valued advice last evening. I have come to the conclusion that no useful purpose would be served by my seeing Mr. Lloyd George at the present moment. He can't unship Sir Rosslyn Weymss, only appointed a week since as First Sea Lord in succession to Lord Jellicoe! Futile months will have to pass on the usual cry: 'Give the new man time!' We gave Jellicoe 13 months' time, and the d—d German submarine menace is really worse than ever, because the new big German type of submarine, with its immense oil endurance, will (shortly) appear on the Pacific Coast and stop our nitrate trade, on which our munitions depend, and has the Admiralty anticipated this? Have they thought it over? *What is their antidote?* Consider those new German type submarines also in the Indian Ocean, and remember what the *Emden* accomplished there!

The German submarine menace has not been adequately dealt with under Jellicoe's régime BECAUSE IT WASN'T HIS JOB! any more than it would have been Lord Nelson's job! I said this at the War Council, and you heard me say it. I said it before Jellicoe. If you have a plague of wasps, you don't send out a mass of little boys with green gauze butterfly nets to catch individual wasps. THAT'S WHAT THE D—D FOOLS AT THE ADMIRALTY HAVE BEEN DOING! No! You tell the gardener: '*Take the wasps' nest!*' He may get stung in doing so;

we may lose a lot of vessels in doing it! But it's only by an offensive carefully planned, with a six months' preparation of suitable apparatus, that the German submarine menace will be annihilated! Huge hippopotami, with oil engines and impervious to gun-fire and immune from attack by submarine, and drawing so little water as to pass over mines, will paddle across the North Sea regardless of the heaviest gale, and walk up on the hostile beaches of the enemy carrying their load of 500 men each, and one hundred can be built in five months with 10 thousand tons of steel! The plan is to hand! The tank is not in it with these amphibian monsters.

In this man-power crisis now on, every species of ship workman should be retained, and the thousands already damnably taken to France should be returned! They tried to take them when I was First Sea Lord, and I went to Kitchener at 5 p.m. and said if he did not there and then (*while I was with him*) issue an order to his pimps to leave the shipyards alone, I would resign at 6 p.m., and he gave the order! I never said a word of it to Winston or anyone else! Had that been continued, what a vastly different shipbuilding situation would now exist! *But there was deadly apathy at the Admiralty!* The British Navy in the House of Commons has been called 'a subsidiary Service' by Sir Ivor Philipps! *To what a depth of naval degradation have we descended!*

The Germans keeping us busy instead of our keeping them busy! German destroyers at the mouth of the Tyne, unharmed and sinking our vessels! German submarines laying mines (the day I was down there) at the mouth of the harbour at Harwich! also unharmed! It's one more 'too late' to add to Mr. Lloyd George's famous 14 instances in his memorable speech long ago now! We have *no audacity and no imagination* amongst our naval and military leaders! *We are lions led by asses!*

When asked for my plan, I quote those immortal words of Mr. Burke in the House of Commons: 'I have no faith in any scheme of war in which the plan is divorced from the execution.'

Yours,

Fisher

N.B. Considered rashness in war is prudence! Prudence in war is usually imbecility!

Postscript. On reading this letter over, I see no reason why you should not show it to the Prime Minister,¹ and you might perhaps

¹ Hankey did forward it to the Prime Minister that same day. 'But I am assured he never reads a letter!' Fisher replied to Hankey.

kindly add that '*my eye is not dim nor my natural force unabated*', but, like Moses, I'm debarred (because I spoke inadvisedly *with my lips*) from taking the Chosen People over the Jordan! *But from Pisgah I see the Promised Land!* Also tell him of my listening to the minister in Bath Abbey the very moment Allenby was entering Jerusalem [December 8th, 1917]! as he was reading Isaiah's prophecy! . . .

469: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

January 3rd, 1918

My dear Lambert,

We employ perhaps the biggest butchers in London. Yesterday we could not get a scrap of meat *of any kind whatsoever!* So the German submarine menace is doing something!

I know you are sceptical of McKenna and Hankey! I lunched with McKenna (urgently asked) and had tea with Hankey! (*Both of them all one's soul desired as regards affection!*) McKenna wished me to back Jellicoe (or at least to see him); he says Jellicoe worships me! I replied I'd see him (Jellicoe) d—d first, and he could stew in his own juice! Hankey entreated me to see Lloyd George, THERE AND THEN! He could arrange it instantly (so he said!). But I'm getting d—d sly now! I said I'd write it down what he wished me to expound, and not being asked by Lloyd George himself, and Lloyd George never having even acknowledged my very important letters of June 12th, 1917, and July 11th, 1917, which I *know* were read at the War Cabinet (and Hankey told me yesterday they caused a deep impression!), I would not again write to him (the P.M.); but I wrote to Hankey and added a note to him that I saw no objection to his, Hankey, sending it on to the Prime Minister.

SECRET. He told me Geddes had asked Lloyd George to let him (Geddes) leave the Admiralty and return to France! Lloyd George in reply told him to hold on a bit.

Does this account for Winston suddenly urgently wishing to meet me a few days since so as to see how I was! and report to Lloyd George! *There was no special reason otherwise!* But he DID say that 'my day was coming', as Wemyss would be swept out by 'regrettable incidents' within 3 months!

Yours,

F.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

470: TO A. G. GARDINER

36, Berkeley Square
January 13th, 1918

PRIVATE

My dear Gardiner,

I wonder if you will find time to wander through the enclosed! *Especially read my letter to Hankey, which Lloyd George has had!* I've been told this evening that Carson is the master of the Government, as he holds the Irish question in his hands! How appalling that such a man should be our autocrat! And also that Balfour is still all-powerful, and is the alternative Prime Minister, and yet how he has wrecked us utterly in his management of the Russian Revolution. I also hear of incredible German exertions for a big push for Calais next month by the Germans, and this is confirmed by the Tirpitz interview reported yesterday.¹ How it confirms my letter to the Prime Minister of June 12 last!!! I enclose a copy.

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

471: TO MRS. GERARD MEYNELL

Ferne House
January 26th, 1918

My dear Esther,

I am at the above address recuperating till middle of April, as I am still $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches less round the waist than normal, and, not being a woman, I wish to return to my usual girth!

I am busy with my life! I call it 'The Meditations of Lord Fisher', and I begin yesterday and work back to when I was weaned and when I was born! I think it's so much nicer to get the best first, when you're hungry! Who cares for the fact my godfather Major Thurlow of the 78th Highlanders told me that I refused to be weaned and kept on! The question is '*how to print it?*' I have an idea of consulting you for your husband to do it at his press.² I think he has one. I

¹ Tirpitz, in a press interview (*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, January 11th, 1918, reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, January 12th), said that, while Germany had to keep the Flanders coast, the annexation of Belgium was not necessary, and a solution could be found.

² Gerard Meynell was Director of the Westminster Press, London. *Some Notes by Lord Fisher for His Friends* was eventually printed there.

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only mean to have a hundred copies done — an Edition de Luxe.
This vellum cover with white satin bows! *Great Primer* title.

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First Portion (Epitome and Episodes)
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The Fanatic
Lord Nelson
Emma Lady Hamilton
Cromwell
Neptune

Motto:— Napoleonic in Audacity, Cromwellian in Thoroughness,
Nelsonic in Execution.

Yours till a cinder,

Fisher

472: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Ferne House
January 28th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

You've sent me a charming birthday letter! But my conscience ruefully attacks me NOW AND ALWAYS at your vain sacrifice of your well-deserved political advantages in the hopeless endeavour to resuscitate me against Tory and Royal and Social animus! When I sought to make the Navy democratic, as I did in my 6 years as First Sea Lord, I sealed my fate! And I ought to have pressed you more than I did to accept Lloyd George's twice repeated offer to you of that post in the Government, where you would have been so successful, and prevented this 'harrying' of the farmers that has taken place! *I am more sorry than I can tell you!* . . .

Always yours,

Fisher

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473: TO THE EARL OF ROSEBERY

Ferne House
January 30th, 1918

Dear Lord Rosebery,

Your kind birthday remembrance found me at the above address, where I am recuperating from a bout of influenza given me by Sir Eric Geddes. Another birthday letter (equally as nice as yours, I think) from an eminent engineer and business man cheers me up by saying also to me that never has France been so vigorously governed as now she is by Clemenceau,¹ and that he is my age! . . .

I know I give you the stomach ache every time I see you and every time I write to you. So did Jeremiah the Jews, when he kept on telling them:

‘The prophets prophesy falsely,
The Tories bear rule by their means.
The People love to have it so,
And what will ye do in the end thereof?’

(*Why! send for Jephthah!!!* See below at * 5th Chapter *Jeremiah*, Verse 31.)

By sea we had recently a wonderful sure certainty of destroying the German Fleet and the Kiel Canal, but we let it slip! There were risks! As if war could be conducted without risks!!! Rashness in war is prudence, and prudence in war is a synonym for imbecility!

Observe the Mediterranean! The whole sea power of France and Italy is collected in the Mediterranean to fight the puny Austrian Fleet! *They haven't fought it!* Not only that, but the *Goeben* and *Breslau*, known to be fast and efficient, emerge from the Dardanelles [January 20th], massacre two of our monitors, never meant to be out there and totally unfitted for the service, and two obsolete British destroyers have to put up a fight, but God intervened and sent the *Goeben* and *Breslau* on top of mines. It was the act of God, not the act of Wemyss, that drove those Germans away from the coast of Syria, where they would have played hell with Allenby! We have pandered to the French and Italians from the beginning of the War!

¹ Georges Clemenceau ('The Tiger'), French Prime Minister, 1906-1909, 1917-1919.

* 'And Jephthah said unto the Elders of Gilead (who came cringing to Jephthah asking him to come back as their Captain), "Did not ye hate me, and expel me [out of my father's house?] and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?"

'And the Elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, "[Therefore] we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight . . ." '! [*Judges xi, 7-8*]

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You know as well as I do that our Expeditionary Force should have been sent to *Antwerp*, not to France! We should then have held the Belgian Coast and the Scheldt, but this was tame for our Generals! They were singing: 'Malbrook se va-t'en guerre'! and they meant to be Peers and Field-M Marshals, and so they are!!!

My Baltic project was scoffed at and turned down in November 1914, and now the Germans are going to annex the Russian Fleet with splendid new dreadnoughts and destroyers galore!

Ichabod!

Yours truly,

Fisher

474: TO THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON

Ferne House
February 1st, 1918

Dear Mr. Dean,

I am at the above address recuperating after an illness that has made me seven inches less round the waist, and not being a woman I dislike this loss of girth! I never disliked Falstaff's figure — it's so robustious!

My landlady [the Duchess of Hamilton], you, and Mrs. Dean met when you both lunched with us that day at the Admiralty. It's on her account I am writing to you. She proposes to spend some £500 on reprinting the Great Bible in modern print (and spelling that won't spoil her children. She has seven!). She is electing that edition which first has the Prayer Book Psalms. She has been advised that it is the 4th Edition, of *November* 1540 [of the Great Bible], which is the edition, but she would prefer the second edition, of *April* 1540, because Cromwell (your predecessor at Wells) appears in the title page, and he really is the sole hero of the Great Bible. Cranmer had nothing whatever to do with it till afterwards. In July 1540 Cromwell had his head cut off, and his name was removed from this Book of Life when the 3rd edition appeared the end of that month of July.

Without troubling yourself, can you kindly say to the Duchess of Hamilton: 'Right you are! Take the April 1540 edition for your reprint! It has the Prayer Book Psalms.'

The Duchess, having studied many Bibles (she is a pious woman),

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is most affected by the beauty of the translation of the Great Bible, as the meanings to her mind of the Holy Spirit are more aptly illuminated there than by the stringent renderings of the scholastic pedants who dwell on the word and not the spirit!

But it's not for me to speak of such things to you. I'm just a voice tube conveying a message and a query from the Duchess. The Coverdale Bible [1535] you gave me I have had bound by Mr. Quaritch in an exact likeness to a book he possessed of A.D. 1535. It really is quite lovely, and your name in it will go down to posterity!

...
Yours,

Fisher

475: TO THE RT. REV. HERBERT E. RYLE¹

Ferne House
February 2nd, 1918

My dear Bishop,

Forgive pencil, for I am in bed with a chill! (I wish I was in an hotel on the Equator, where no cold blasts afflict one and 'only man is vile'! I don't think an east wind is known there!) Just after writing enclosed to the Dean of Wells, it occurred to me that your eruditioned mind might also help the Duchess of Hamilton, so I venture to send correspondence herewith (*even including my outburst on the War!*). Your predecessor has been so sweetly kind to me in unravelling ancient renderings of the Holy Word, such as when St. Paul prays for 'free passage' for his words! and 'my yoke is soft', not 'easy' — (*well padded with the Heavenly Grace!*). And again, 'Come unto me all ye that "TRAVEL" and I will "REFRESH" you' — *not* give you 'REST'. The Pilgrim on a journey! No *rest* here, or it would be Heaven! Not 'weary', because this life is *not* 'weary' if you do your duty regardless of consequences! It's a very joyful life indeed — (at least so I have found it, and few have had so many enemies!). King Edward said to me that he was the only friend I had! My answer to him was: '*Perhaps so, Sir, but you've backed the "Winner"!*' And so he had! I emerged after six years of fighting with the scalps of my enemies around my girdle! 19½ millions sterling of Parasites I swept away —

¹ Ryle, the Dean of Westminster, 1911-1925.

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animate and inanimate. Of course I was hated! But I have digressed from Holy Writ! If you are busy, don't trouble to reply.

Yours till the Angels smile on us!

Fisher

One more ancient rendering occurs to me! 'Sufficient unto the day is the "MALICE" thereof', and 'It's better to enter Heaven "goggle-eyed" than having two eyes', etc., etc.

Those two great atheists [Herbert Spencer and T. H. Huxley] talking to each other in the Athenaeum Club hit it off! They said they wouldn't discuss the inspiration of the Scriptures, but that company of unknown holy men who translated the original text in 1539 (The Great Bible), they were inspired! They avoided a pedantic literalism, and gave forth the 'Spirit' in English at its maximum of beauty and of one syllables! ('SUCH as are gentle, THEM shall He learn His way'!) All the opening sentences of the Prayer Book of 1602 are quite different to our present rendering, and far more effective!

I've got such a Prayer Book bound up with the Geneva Bible — it's just lovely! How those Puritans went for the Pope! And didn't he deserve it? Wycliffe's bones dug up and burnt, and put on a dunghill! Tyndale strangled and burnt! Coverdale died of hunger! Cromwell and Cranmer had their heads cut off! And yet we don't worship the ground they trod on! Where are monuments to these great heroes? — and Generals you never heard of all over the place!

476: TO ADMIRAL (RET.) SIR REGINALD
HENDERSON

Ferne House
February 9th, 1918

My beloved Friend,

... I hope soon to be more fit than ever, and ready for any emergency. I only read yesterday, in the VIIth chapter of *Exodus* and 7th verse, that Moses was 80 years old when he took on the job with Pharaoh to deliver his countrymen. I hope this is an omen, but yet I didn't want to wait another three years! Barham also was 80 when First Sea Lord and First Lord, and arranged Trafalgar. But one must not complain!

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

'Not Heaven itself upon the past has power;
What has been has been, and I have had my hour.'

This is written by Dryden, and is excellent, I think. . . .

I hope you keep well! I rejoice always to see you, and failing that,
to hear from you!

Heaven prosper you!

Yours always,

Fisher

477: TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

Ferne House
February 19th, 1918

My dear Hankey,

I am at the above address recovering from a bout of influenza, but hope to be in London again very shortly, 'fixed and fit for use'!

I am writing to ask you kindly to let Longhurst¹ send me that day's proceedings of the Committee of Imperial Defence (long ago) when the Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, unexpectedly asked me to express my opinion of the lecture given us by our military colleagues (with such beautiful illustrative maps) of the French front in the event of war between Germany and France! You and I have always had this great bond of union, that we both instinctively felt sure that the traditional action of the British Army was right to act in subsidiary campaigns with a limited responsibility in conjunction with the British Fleet, *and not to take part in Continental struggles* except indirectly by means of subsidies and securing the passage of supplies overseas.

I prepared a memorandum in November 1914 propounding this view, and printed in large italics that the military policy pursued in antagonism to every principle of war had the disastrous effect of relegating the British Navy into the role of a subsidiary Service (it was so described recently in the House of Commons by Sir Ivor Philipps), and that in the War as started and then conducted after three months of war, so far as the British Navy was concerned, the British Army might as well be in Timbuctoo — this I printed in big italics! This, together with an emasculated blockade, ruined our

¹ Cyril Longhurst, Assistant Secretary to the C.I.D., 1915-1939.

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magnificent sea supremacy 'doing its bit in the War'! *And we have never recovered from it!*

The meanest capacity was capable of comprehending the puny effect of our tiny force of 160,000 men against the German millions, and the contrary enormous effect of these same 160,000 men being thrown into Antwerp, with the British Fleet in support with inexhaustible supplies, and holding the Belgian Coast and occupying the Scheldt. So we had the massacre of Mons! The fall of Antwerp! The Belgian coast a German submarine depot and German air raid base against England! All this flowed from deserting the principles of Mr. Pitt. We could have raised the wonderful armies just as well, but they would have been taken to the Pomeranian coast 82 miles from Berlin, and the Baltic would not have been, as it is now, a German Lake. Frederick the Great, as I pointed out in my memorandum of November 1914, and often times before quoted it, considered such a hostile landing as the most deadly dread of Prussia, and he sent for a bottle of poison when the Russians landed, but the sudden death of the Russian Empress [Elizabeth] brought him peace! and the poison wasn't used! Sir John French, as you know, came over three times to the War Council and discussed the advance of the British Army along the Belgian coast supported by the British Fleet, and agreed he could do it with two divisions, but alas! the project was wrecked and with it the Baltic Project also, and our resources were diverted and perverted elsewhere.

Send me the papers.

Yours,

Fisher

478: FROM LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

Offices of the War Cabinet
February 21st, 1918

Private and Confidential

My dear Lord Fisher,

Please excuse dictated letter. I enclose the document for which you asked. I have often pondered over whether we were right in our views about the proper attitude of the British Army, and on the whole, in spite of all that has happened, I believe we were. The

question is what would have happened if the original British Expeditionary Force had not gone to France? Of course, it was only a drop in the ocean, and the value, though not the gallantry, of its exploits have probably been overrated. After all, it was a very long time indeed before our forces held any considerable portion of the line. Had they not been there, the French would never have undertaken the attacks in the regions of Artois and the Champagne in 1915, which were so barren of results and so disastrous to their manpower. They would have stuck on the defensive, and it would have been the Germans who would have suffered the bloody losses; that is to say, the French would have preserved their staying power instead of wasting it in perfectly futile operations. The only doubt I have in my mind is whether the moral effect of our force on the French nation may have been out of proportion to its material effect. I think that is conceivable, and that the knowledge of the great forces that were eventually coming may have buoyed the French up through bad days. I feel very doubtful, however, whether the conditions could ever have been arrived at which would have enabled our forces to act against Berlin in the manner you contemplate. I agree in the desirability, but I have doubts as to the practicability.

Anyhow, I have never had the smallest doubt that we built up too great an Army. We never ought to have taken one man away from shipbuilding, or from work in our ports. We ought to have equipped Russia before we equipped our own Armies, because, had we done so, the Russians would never have sustained the appalling losses they did in putting pikes against rifles and machine-guns. This was the real reason of the Russian catastrophe — the appalling casualties and the inability of the old régime to supply armaments on a modern scale. Had this been our policy, I believe the War would have been won long ago, particularly if the Dardanelles scheme had been driven through, instead of wasting our efforts on perfectly futile attacks at Loos and Lens and the Hohenzollern redoubt, etc., etc. Had we followed this policy, utilized our main forces to attack Berlin, if it could be done, or if it could not, to make sure of the Dardanelles to get Turkey out of the War and to keep Bulgaria in; had we equipped Russia on a modern scale in 1915; had we devoted greater efforts to naval anti-submarine measures, such as, mining;* had we built merchant ships and developed agriculture — had we done all this, I say that probably the War would have been won; if it had not, we should still have available the transport to

* No reflection on you, because you did all you could, but you were not followed up.

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bring the Americans into effective play at a reasonably early date, and we should still have vast reserves of man-power sufficient, together with the Americans, to make an end of the business. I do not think that you or I ever ceased to think on these lines, but we were overpowered by the wave of unthinking militarism which swept over the country and submerged the Government in the early days of the War.

Delighted to hear you are all right again.

Yours ever,

M. P. A. Hankey

479: TO CYRIL LONGHURST

Ferne House

February 26th, 1918

Private and Secret

My dear Longhurst,

Kindly tell Hankey I am still at the above address till March 5th, when I come to Berkeley Square and shall then hope to see him and PUT HIM RIGHT about some ERRONEOUS deductions in his letter to me! He does not meet the case of our small Expeditionary Force of 6 divisions going to Antwerp instead of to the 'Massacre of Mons'! With our Fleet we could have poured in inexhaustible supplies of men and munitions into Antwerp and rendered it impregnable and held the Belgian coast and the Scheldt, and so prevented the German advance into France! and stopped the submarine menace and prevented air raids, but I am solely writing to you now to say that you have sent me *the wrong paper*. The print I want (of which I have a note) is where both Sir Henry Wilson and Sir D. Henderson (the air man)¹ were present — and I quoted the *Book of Kings* to the Prime Minister. 'Fight neither with small or great. Fight only with the puny British Army and annihilate it!' as the German Emperor ordered his Generals soon after he, the Emperor, called it a 'Contemptible little Army'! Mr. Asquith adjourned the meeting the moment I finished speaking and no conclusion was reached! I

¹ General (afterwards Field-Marshal, first Baronet) Sir Henry Wilson, who had succeeded Robertson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff on February 18th, had been Director of Military Operations, Imperial General Staff, 1910-1914; Lieutenant-General Sir David Henderson, Director-General of Military Aeronautics, 1913-1918, had, when Director of Military Training (1911-1912), served on a sub-committee of the C.I.D.

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walked away arm in arm with Lord Esher, and in view of what French had just said at the meeting, I said to Esher: '*Is that d—d fool really going to be our Generalissimo?*'

Yours,

Fisher

480: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

February 28th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

I've taken out (WITH EXTREME RELUCTANCE) all the allusions to you in my 'Meditations'! They were really rather nice, some of them! But I defer to your wishes, and perhaps you are right! I'm hustling along with them in view of your wishing me now to publish them. I've had eleven offers now from publishers, with prices beyond the dreams of avarice, but I think I'll stick to a *private circulation*! You shall see the very first proof, and you can then cut out what you like.

It was very kind of you to see Phillips about Bonar Law's two unsophisticated lies in House of Commons.¹ I enclose you the refutation in case Phillips did not make it clear! The print that BOTH Asquith and Churchill each had was marked with Eyre and Spottiswoode's date of JANUARY 1914! And I was prevented going to meeting of Defence Committee on *May 14, 1914*, and so wrote that providential letter to Asquith with opinions on the three subjects to be discussed, which brought in the submarine paper. Also I have a

¹ Jellicoe had recently stated that in 1912 Fisher had presented to the Admiralty a memorandum warning the Government that in the event of war German submarines would be used against merchant ships. Bonar Law, answering Commander Carlyon Bellairs in the House of Commons on February 25th, said that Fisher was not a member of the C.I.D. in 1912 and that no such memorandum had been submitted. The Admiral sent this refutation to Hankey on February 26th, threatening to raise the question in the House of Lords if Bonar Law did not modify his statement: 'I possess a communication from King Edward on my leaving the Admiralty in January 1910, that it had been arranged I should continue to be a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence. By the enclosed letter to the Prime Minister on May 14th, 1914 [*Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 504-5], it is obvious I was a member then. I possess no document that I ceased being a member between those dates. Mr. Asquith and Mr. Churchill each received the enclosed print on submarines (it will be seen that it was printed in January 1914), but whether it was circulated to members of C.I.D. I can't say!'

But it seems that the part of the trouble stemmed from a clerical error in the Treasury, the word 'not' having been slipped into the answer to Bellairs. The offending word was dropped out of the official record in Hansard (Hankey to Fisher, March 1st, 1918). See further, Letter No. 483.

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letter somewhere from Winston extolling my submarine paper to the skies, but '*regretting that it was* MARRED' by the statement that merchant ships, with unoffending and defenceless passengers, men, women and children, would be sunk without notice. Then I sent him the memorable postscript, quoting: (1) Togo, (2) Nogi, (3) Skobeloff — each of whom massacred without mercy!

I do hope Bonar Law will be gentleman enough to apologize. I've always supposed him a gentleman. When I say 'gentleman', I mean the original Saxon definition of the word 'gentleman': 'A man who never hurts another's feelings', and not necessarily a man who wears a white shirt and has a bath every day!

So Eric Geddes was away three weeks in Salonika and elsewhere. Who was in charge of the Navy? Echo asks 'Who'?!!

My best love to the Prophetess. I am still putting on weight!

Yours,

F.

481: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

February 28th, 1918

My dear Friend,

You ask me in your letter this moment received what I would do NOW in this momentous crisis of this effctely conducted war by the British Navy! A 'cotton-wool' strategy! A strategy founded on the imbecile dictum of taking no risks! A strategy that has elicited the remark in the House of Commons by Sir Ivor Philipps, M.P. that the British Navy is a '*Subsidiary Service*'!!! And it is true! Sir John Jellicoe, with his great authority and utter ignorance of our sea policy, said that the only mission of the English Navy was to 'hold the ring'!!! Read my letter to Lord Rosebery herewith, where I show how *quite recently* we lost a golden opportunity of wrecking the German Fleet and wrecking the Kiel Canal.

Well, in reply to your question, *this is what I would do now!* I would carry out the policy enunciated in the enclosed print on the Baltic Project, prepared early in 1914 and again reverted to in my letter to the Prime Minister dated June 2, 1916:

Sow the North Sea with mines as thick as the leaves in Vallombrosa! That blocks effectually the Kiel Canal if continued laying of these mines is *always, continually going on with damnable pertinacity!*

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Then I guarantee to force a passage into the Baltic in combination with a great military co-operation, but that co-operation must not be the co-operation of the Walcheren Expedition!

‘Lord Chatham with his sword drawn
Was waiting for Sir Richard Strachan,
Sir Richard, longing to be at ’em,
Was waiting for the Earl of Chatham’!¹

It has got to be a naval job! And the Army will be landed by the Navy! Further in detail I won’t go, *but I can guarantee success.* Have I ever failed yet? It’s an egotistical question, *but I never have!* What a d—d fool I should be to brag now if I wasn’t certain!

Please read all three attached papers.

Yours,

Fisher

482: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

March 2nd, 1918

My dear Lambert,

You write anxious to have some connected statement in regard to the whole history of the German submarine menace, so as to use it in the debate on the Navy Estimates, next Tuesday, March 5th.

Now, the first observation thereon is McKenna’s indisputable statement that no private person, whether member of Parliament or otherwise, can hope to fight successfully any public department, so even if you had the most consummate evidence of effete apathy, such as existed during the whole of the Balfourian administration of the Admiralty, you would to the world at large be refuted by the ‘departmental facts’ of that long ass, Macnamara! So I tell you it is hopeless. Nevertheless, here is a bit of history!

I think in December 1915, the Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, unexpectedly came up to me in the Lobby and said he was anxious to consult me about naval affairs, and he would take an early opportunity to see me. I fancy he was put off, as I never saw him.

¹ ‘At Walcheren, 1809’, an anonymous contemporary epigram commemorating the disastrous attempt in the Napoleonic wars to capture the island of Walcheren, destroy the French Fleet in the Scheldt, and take Antwerp. The dilatoriness of the leaders, together with an outbreak of illness among the troops, largely explains the fiasco.

But I wrote to him in January saying he should see Sir John Jellicoe in regard to the paucity of vessels and measures to cope with the German submarine menace. After great opposition by the Admiralty, Jellicoe was sent for by the Prime Minister (*not by the Admiralty*) and appeared before the War Council. This is an extract from my letter to Jellicoe, dated February 7th, 1916 . . . Well, Jellicoe did not make a good fight. He was a '*no talker*' opposed to a mass of '*ALL TALKERS*'! But when he got back to Scapa Flow, he wrote a memorandum which put himself right.

I also was had up before the War Council, and I forget how many Admiralty Departmental officials sat at the table. A great number, anyhow, and one after another they shied statistics at me! '*Departmental facts*' such as you'll get shied at you next Tuesday! It's hopeless! A wordy war is no use: what is necessary is a Cataclysm! You want to swallow up Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and have a fresh lot! Similarly you'll have a lot of *suggestio falsi* and *suppressio veri* in regard to my submarine paper. A little bit of truth skilfully disguised!

'A truth that's told with bad intent
Beats any lie you can invent.'

Yours always,

Fisher

'I told you so'!

Everyone hates the man who with a disgusting air of a superior brain says to you when you have made an awful mess of it: 'I told you so!' Nevertheless it is occasionally quite unavoidable even for an experienced idiot to be dumb, even Balaam's ass spoke when aggravated beyond endurance.

Well! the annihilation of Admiral von Spee's powerful Squadron of eleven ships at the Falkland Islands and our failure to occupy the Baltic at the outset of the War are the two outstanding features of the War. By one we gained the Ocean, by the other we lost Russia. We forgot Napoleon's lecture that the Sea was our Battle Ground and not the Continent, and that the British Army was a projectile to be fired by the British Navy. . . .

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483: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

March 3rd, 1918

Dear Lambert,

I think Mr. Bonar Law is a 'cad' of the first water! Who would know of the millions who read his answer in Parliament that by private arrangement with Bellairs the word '*not*' *had been dropped out* in Hansard! AFTER Hansard (mind you!) had been circulated to everyone with the *original lies in it*!

So I hope you will very kindly press this matter home and make the observation that common truthfulness should have moved Mr. Bonar Law of HIS OWN INITIATIVE to get up at once when he was told of it and apologize for TWO lies, not *one only*! They can't get over Eyre & Spottiswoode's print mark of January 1914. Look at the enclosed. However, your parliamentary question is perfect.¹

Yours,

F.

484: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Ferne House

March 3rd, 1918

My beloved Friend,

I am at the above address recuperating after an attack of influenza given me by Sir Eric Geddes! (D—N HIM!) I have put on nearly a stone in weight, so I'm all right, I hope.

I go to London next Tuesday, March 5th, and return here March 7th. I go up to meet 'the Magi' at Victory House. I have been reorganized out of existence and occupy now a sphere of abstraction in science in the great company of Sir J. Thomson, O.M., President, Royal Society, Master of Trinity, Sir Charles Parsons, F.R.S.,

¹ Lambert put this question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Bonar Law, on March 5th: whether Fisher had submitted to the C.I.D. on May 14th, 1914, a memorandum pointing out that the coming of the submarine had broken down the whole foundation of Britain's traditional naval strategy, and that the question had to be faced as to how a blockade could be enforced and British mercantile commerce protected. Bonar Law replied that Fisher had written a memorandum early in 1914, but that it was given personally to the Prime Minister and First Lord and was not circulated to the C.I.D. or the Cabinet. As regarded his statement of February 25th, he was having the word 'not' eliminated from the bound volume of Hansard. He refused to be drawn out by Lambert's query as to why he had not made the correction before. But the bound volume of Hansard retains the 'not' (*Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. ciii, p. 1094).

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inventor of the turbine, Sir George Beilby, F.R.S., who found manure in shale with a fortune of £70,000 a year!

I wrote to the First Lord of the Admiralty on behalf of self and these prodigies of science

‘Ave Geddes! Imperator!
Morituri te salutant!’

All he did was to give me the influenza. He didn’t even make me a Viscount! (N.B.! Whenever you make a d—d mess of it, you’re made a Viscount! WATCH THE VISCOUNTS!)

I’ve used my leisure here to write my Meditations on a mis-spent life! I’ve written them backwards. I’ve left where I was born and early stories of how little boys say wonderful things (Nelson said he didn’t know what fear was! So Southey says in his *Life*) — I have left all this to the end and began my life yesterday. I enclose you the title page and preamble. What do you think of them? Amend and return! The Duchess kindly invited E. Hallam Moorhouse down here with her children to put my wild effusions in order for the printer. I’ve given everyone names out of Bunyan, as this avoids libel actions! Asquith is Mr. Facing-both-ways! and so on! . . .

Yours,

Fisher

485: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

[Ferne House]
March 8th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

Since writing this morning I have got your welcome letter! Without doubt your speech has had a big effect!¹ But Lloyd George is not going to have me because Balfour pulls the strings via Bonar Law. Bonar Law is on the closest terms with Balfour and sees him every day, I’m told, and always play tennis together. No, I fear it’s really hopeless my getting back, and that’s why I urge you to look after your own interests and let me go to the Devil! However, I am putting on weight and feel it in me that I am going to be as strong

¹ This presumably refers to Lambert’s speech in the House of Commons on March 6th. Among his principal points: He did not think the Government realized to what extent U-boats were affecting the economic life of the country, and the methods of destroying them were inadequate. Fisher could do the job.

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as ever I was in my life, so I shan't go to the Devil for some time! D.V.!

Merz, the new man who is Director of Research at Admiralty, whose partner is Chief of the Staff to Wemyss, and who Geddes always has with him (Col. MacMillan, I think his name)¹ — well! Merz interviewed me yesterday before the meeting of the Magi at Victory House, and I gave it to him hot as to the past and present conduct of the War, but didn't quite finish, as Sir J. J. Thomson and the other great people came in, so I wrote Merz enclosed letter as very possibly he may be a missionary, for he seemed very greatly impressed and petrified (he was quite dumb all the rest of the meeting!).

Tell me, please, what you think of the size of the proposed book and the size of the print. Do you think it's too big altogether? There will be about 400 pages! I am still doubtful about letting one single copy ever being seen by anyone. But I'm convinced that it's a good thing to get it printed while I am alive. . . .

My heart is with you!

Yours,

Fisher

486: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Ferne House
March 13th, 1918

My dear Winston,

I 'fortuned' (I borrow that word from John Wicliff, A.D. 1380!) — I fortunated last night to find your delightful birthday letter to me written 15 months ago — BEFORE THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION! and had it been acted on, the War would have been won by us by now! You say in this letter, '*A descent on the German Coast and the entry and domination of the Baltic would secure a decisive victory for the Allies*'! (I enclose you copy of the portion of your letter that matters!)

Further, I find this recorded in my notes of the proceedings of the War Council (*and these notes of mine cannot be gainsaid! I have compared them with the official notes!*):

¹ Charles H. Merz, consulting engineer, senior partner, Merz & McLellan, Director of Experiment and Research at the Admiralty, 1918-1919; John (afterwards Sir John) C. McLellan (not 'MacMillan'), a civilian concerned with the development of anti-submarine measures in 1917-1918.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

9th Meeting of War Council, January 28th, 1915, 6.30 p.m.

'Mr. Churchill announced *that the ultimate object of the Navy was to obtain access to the Baltic. Mr. Churchill said this operation was of great importance as Germany was, AND ALWAYS HAD BEEN, very nervous of an attack from the Baltic. For this purpose special vessels were required, and the First Sea Lord (Lord Fisher) had designed cruisers, etc., etc.*

'Mr. Lloyd George (Chancellor of the Exchequer) said that if Mr. Churchill would send him a memorandum, he would sanction this expenditure.'

(Which he nobly did! and 612 vessels of various types formed the Great Armada destined for the great decisive action.)

I digress here for a moment to tell you of a very great historical incident. The German Emperor said to my friend, Mr. Beit, that I was Germany's worst enemy and he knew I had in my mind the invasion of Germany on the Pomeranian Coast. This arose from my having got into trouble for having said to King Edward in A.D. 1907 that we ought to 'Copenhagen' the German Fleet at Kiel, as we had a sure victory, and either Pitt or Bismarck would do it before Germany got too strong for us!¹

To proceed: Four days ago I wrote enclosed letter. Kindly study it in corroboration of your birthday letter to me, and of your statement to the War Council on January 28th, 1915, and endeavour to get Mr. Lloyd George to read it.

Yours,

Fisher

I am very fit now and have put on a stone in weight. I was in London last week, but had no time to come and see you.

Postscript. A great friend of mine, who is a most acute observer of men and things, made this remark about the present First Sea Lord, whom he knows intimately, 'that he has never shown any particular talent up to now (when he is put into a very important post) and it is VERY UNUSUAL that a man who HAS any talent does not show any sign of it till he is between 50 and 60 years old'.²

¹ See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, 20, 168, n. 2.

² Churchill replied on March 16th: 'I am very much interested in your letter, and you know how closely I share your views. . . . We have a long and terrible struggle before us, and its prolongation is due to our failure to use not the sea power but the amphibious power of England with real decision in 1915 either on one flank or the other of the enemy's battle-front.'

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

487: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

March 18th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

I wrote to you yesterday that on Thursday, September 5th next (or 25 weeks from the report of last Thursday of shipping losses by the German submarines), our tonnage wastage would have reached a stage that necessitated an ignoble peace. Should you allude to this prophecy of mine, I hope you will repeat your statement in the House of Commons how I dealt with Kitchener when his d—d recruiting asses endeavoured to get shipworkers from Cammell Laird's yard and other places. Kitchener wrote the order while I stood over him to cancel this outrageous recruiting wrong-doing! Macnamara now unctuously tells the House of Commons that 20,000 shipworkers are now going to be withdrawn from the Army! *Why did Mr. Balfour as First Lord of the Admiralty ever permit them to go?* (He wriggles out of every mess! Dardanelles, Kut, etc., etc., and makes a dialectical exhibition in the House of Commons, and is voted wonderful! And is now the alternative Prime Minister without Lloyd George suspecting it!) *But this is the point I now impress on you!* No matter how intense your efforts may be in hustling the building of new tonnage, you can't possibly in 25 weeks provide it! *Only a big scheme of attack on the submarine exits will avail!* But even that may be another 'Too Late'! And can Wemyss do it???

Yours,

F.

488: FROM GEORGE LAMBERT

House of Commons

March 22nd, 1918

My dear Lord,

I had a long talk with Carson last night. He recounted a conversation with you:

'Your last [First] Sea Lord ought to be shot!'

'Why?'

'He left the Grand Fleet, for which I trained him and he was especially fitted.'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

Carson: 'I once heard of a great First Sea Lord who because he could not get on with First Lord put on his hat, marched out of the building, and was not heard of until he got to Scotland.'

Fisher: 'You have me there.'

Then, says Carson, he wrote my wife a letter saying he ought to have said, 'There was a great Cabinet Minister who in the midst of a great war left his post because forces were not sent to Salonika.'¹ Carson said, however, 'I like Fisher.' He refused to discuss the Baltic project, saying it was 'before my time'. He is furious with Geddes.

Then at dinner I saw Scott, *Manchester Guardian*, and said, 'Why don't you open out on Fisher?' He said, 'Well, can I?' I said 'Certainly, and if you did, Lloyd George would pay attention.' He said, 'You have spoken to Lloyd George?' 'Yes,' and he said they would all resign, but I said, 'they did not resign when Winston Churchill was brought in, and he was a bigger pill than Fisher.' I left Scott pondering.

My wife was in the gallery Wednesday, hoping to hear me speak, but I was cut out. When we left we passed L. G., who gave her a charming smile, so she is now an ardent L. G.ite.

Ever yours,

G. L.

489: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

March 24th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

... Phillips telephoned to me last night that he had contradicted a report that I was at death's door. Apparently the *Evening Standard* started it. Treves and Bertrand Dawson wanted to put in a medical bulletin signed by them that I was fit for anything, but I declined, as I think it's only advertising to do that. *Silence is the great weapon!*

Racing and brewing seem to be the two specially favoured trades, for after all racing is a pure trade! *And with the most powerful trade's union on earth!* See how they made the Government *cave in!* It's remarkable how the Liberal newspapers have all 'kow-towed' to this aristocratic wasting of food on race horses, and petrol on motor cars, and railway plant on special trains! I think really this war is a

¹ Carson had resigned from the Government (he had been Attorney-General) in October 1915 because of the Government's abandonment of Serbia to her fate through unwillingness to land troops at Salonika and push them along to the help of Serbia.

judgment on us for having become the lowest and most ignominious form of snobs!! Observe how everyone is running after honours! I see the papers all say it's quite the right thing in a military war to retire when you are attacked to a stronger position! I heard that same also in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera! I've no doubt Hindenburg is going for Calais and will mop up the Portuguese and the Belgians. Both quite worthless! 25,000 Belgians ran like one man and lost Namur at the beginning of the War, and so they did at Waterloo — and at Lisbon I've seen one British bluejacket send a regiment of Portuguese flying who tried to arrest him. Look at them in East Africa!

Yours,

F.

I've gone up four pounds this week!¹ and walked six miles yesterday.

490: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

March 26th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

No one in war can say what an hour may bring forth! We may yet have a dramatic change such as occurred with von Kluck when he had Paris in his grasp [1914] and didn't grasp it!!! To my mind the outstanding General at present is von Hutier. He was the one and only German who forced our retreat at Bapaume. Funny that the German official accounts don't praise him, but just mention his name with a lot of others! It is always so! What a lot of crashes this war has caused—

Tirpitz	sunk.
Joffre	stranded.
Kitchener	drowned.
Fisher	marooned.
Lord French	made a Viscount!
Lord Jellicoe	ditto.
Lord Devonport	ditto.
Bethmann von Hollweg ²	torpedoed.
Asquith	ditto.

¹ He was then at 10 stone, 4 lb., or one stone heavier than the minimum he had got down to. His normal weight was 12 stone, 2 lb.

² Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, German Chancellor, 1909-1917.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

And now poor old Pirrie will perhaps be made an Earl like old Brassey or Lord Marconi!¹ Pirrie hasn't a dog's chance! All the other shipbuilders hate him! He underbid them all and overpaid his workmen! He can't do the job in 20 weeks! The Angel Gabriel couldn't! Even the Almighty can't make 2 and 2 into 5! It's 4!

Yours,

F.

491: TO ?

March 27th, 1918

Dear Friend,

When I was at Bath I read in the local paper a beautiful letter aptly alluding to the Mount Fiesole of Bath and quoting what has been termed that mysterious verse of David's:

'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills . . .'

Well! the other day a great friend of that wonderful Hebrew scholar, Dr. Ginsburg — he died long since at Capri — told me that Ginsburg had said to him that all the revisers and translators had missed a peculiar Hebraism which quite alters the signification of this opening verse of the 121st Psalm. It should read:

'*Shall* I lift up mine eyes to those hills? DO TH my help come from thence?'

And this is the explanation: Those hills alluded to were the hills in which were the groves planted in honour of the idols towards which Israel had strayed. So in the second verse the inspired tongue says:

'No! My help cometh from the Lord! He who hath made Heaven and Earth!' (not these idols).

I have had an innate admiration for Ginsburg ever since he shut up the two atheists in the Athenaeum Club, Huxley and Herbert Spencer, who were reviling Holy Writ in Ginsburg's presence and

¹ The first Baron (afterwards first Viscount) Pirrie, Comptroller-General of Merchant Shipbuilding, 1918, to organize the production of merchant ships; the first Earl Brassey, founder (1886) and first Editor of the *Naval Annual*, and onetime Civil Lord of the Admiralty (1880-1884) and Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty (1884-1885); Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of wireless, created a marquis (marchese) by the Italian Government. To this list he added, in a letter of the next day to Robert Donald: Robertson—'The "Eastern Command" in Timbuctoo' [Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Command at home, February-June 1918]; von Moltke [Chief of the German General Staff, 1906-1914] — 'Torpedoed'; Falkenhayn — 'ditto'; von Pohl — 'Committed suicide.'

flaunting him. So he asked the two of them to produce anything anywhere in literature comparable to the 23rd Psalm as translated by Wicliff, Tyndale, and Coverdale. He gave them a week to examine, and at the end of it they confessed that Ginsburg was right and in confessing they said a very beautiful thing indeed. I couldn't find out which said it, but these were the words of the unbeliever:

'I won't argue about nor admit the inspiration claimed, but I say this, that those saintly men who Cromwell formed as the company to produce the Great Bible of A.D. 1539, THEY WERE INSPIRED, for never has the spirit of the original Hebrew been more beautifully transformed from the original hardness into such spiritual wealth.'

Those are not the exact words, I have not got them by me, but that was the sense.

The English language in A.D. 1539 was at its very maximum. Hence the beauty of the Psalms which come from the Great Bible as produced by that holy company of pious men, who, one writer says, 'did not wish their names to be ever known'....

Yours,

Fisher

...

492: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Ferne House
March 30th, 1918

Private

My dear Arnold White,

Just got your letter suggesting a speech on submarines in the House of Lords. I don't suppose that anyone has ever lived who has been more enticed, cajoled, threatened, aspersed and maligned than I have to make speeches ever since 'the Truth about the Navy' some 30 years ago!¹ In all I've made 4 speeches! All very short! Do you know my inmost reason? I'll tell you! A chap called Arnold White ages ago said there was no advertisement comparable to the silent devil who never opened his mouth.

Yours,

F.

¹ Fisher, a captain at that time, had collaborated with W. T. Stead in the production of the 'Truth about the Navy', an anonymous series of powerful articles that played an important role in the Navy Scare of 1884.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

P.S. A few months ago I discovered copies of letters to a Cabinet Minister and a high official at Admiralty, dated January 5, 1904, to say that the day would come in the next big war of a big uprising against the Admiralty and Government for not recognizing the submarine menace!¹

493: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Ferne House
March 30th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

[Newspaper cutting]

SIXTEEN BIG SHIPS DOWN

The statistics of our U-boat losses issued to-day are up again, and there really seems to be no improvement whatever in our measures of defence. It is really extraordinary how very closely each week keeps to the average of destruction. We have, in fact, reached an equilibrium which we must hope the Admiralty will soon destroy in our favour.

I see this in last night's paper. I wrote to Merz (*who is Geddes's new invention for the anti-submarine business!*) that it's simply playing the fool to go on as at present, and outlined the one and only way! BUT ALAS! WHAT USE TALKING?

I've discovered copy of a rare letter I wrote to King Edward in 1908 saying what ought to be arranged with Russia and Turkey to make them both efficient to join us in the inevitable war with Germany, *but the Foreign Office 'pooh-poohed' my letter!*² Just as they in this war, they, the Foreign Office, utterly damned us by stopping the blockade!

I walked 10 miles yesterday without being tired, and this last seven days I've walked over 50 miles by the map! So I'm fit enough! *But there's not going to be even 'one hour of good old Dandolo'!*

Ever yours,

Fisher

¹ See *Fear God and Dread Nought*, I, 293-4.

² See *ibid.*, II, 168-9, which may be the letter in question.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

494: TO MRS. REGINALD MCKENNA

Ferne House
April 2nd, 1918

My dear Guardian,

. . . I am being bombarded on all sides (*Tories, Radicals, journalists, and Labour*) to make a speech in the House of Lords on the baleful strategy by Sea Lords which has near wrecked us and lost us the Russians! But should I not be *labelled as 'too late'?* *The mischief is done* and we are not in the Baltic or at Antwerp.

Yours,

F.

495: FROM LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR MAURICE
HANKEY

Offices of the War Cabinet
April 18th, 1918

My dear Lord Fisher,

Last night I dined with Esher. He showed me letters of yours dated 1904 describing in detail the submarine campaign of 1917. It is the most amazing thing I have ever read — not one letter only, for he dipped into several.¹

Also some astonishing remarks about the generals who ought to man the War Office (it was the time of the Esher reorganization committee). French, Smith-Dorrien, Haig — all men who have come to the top, were your nominees. Finally *Plumer* (whom few people knew about) picked out for Q.M.G. [Quartermaster General] with this remark: 'Every vote against Plumer is a vote for paper boots and insufficient shells!' Priceless, the whole thing.²

Neck-busy though I am, I have come to the office ten minutes early to pay this tribute of my undying admiration, and to beg you to get hold of these astounding documents for your memoirs. But anyhow they will appear in Esher's memoirs, I suppose. Reference will also be made to them in mine, when, 20 years hence, when the

¹ See *ibid.*, I, 304-5, 310, and especially Fisher's letter to Admiral William H. May on pp. 308-9.

² See *ibid.*, I, 292, 295-9.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

War is being gradually brought to an end by our sea-power, I start to write them.

Yours ever,

M. P. A. Hankey

496: TO WILLIAM M. R. PRINGLE¹

36, Berkeley Square
April 19th, 1918

Private

Dear Mr. Pringle,

At lunch the other day you wondered I did not resign on the very inception of the Dardanelles madness! I enclose a brief précis of my reasons which I gave to Lord Cromer, who, being an anointed scoundrel, suppressed it, but just now one has a disgust and a distaste for past controversy in our present agony at the awful appalling ineptitude of our leaders. A nation of lions led by asses! — politically, militarily, and naval! *All asses!* And it is all solely and entirely due to our being a nation of snobs!!!

What does Prince Lichnowsky say?² *do read it!* He says from the lowest to the highest we are snobs! What is the consequence? Social influence and the petticoat give us our leaders! The only cure is a Cromwell! I DON'T SEE HIM YET!

I speak with experience. Wait till you read it shortly, '*Fisher's Meditations*' (now printing!). To think that millions have been massacred by these Emperors' and Kings' sole action in bringing about this War! *Surely this should upraise us to sweep the whole d—d lot away once for all! not even shadows of them to be left!*

Yours,

Fisher

Mr. Lynch in the House of Commons, March 21st, 1918. *Hansard*, column 1288.

(I've never spoken to Mr. Lynch — know nothing of him — am told

¹ Pringle, Liberal M.P., 1910-1918, 1922-1924.

² Prince Karl Lichnowsky, German Ambassador at London, 1912-1914, had, in 1916, written a famous memorandum on 'My London Mission, 1912-1914'. It had recently been published in Germany, and Cassell & Co. had just published an English translation. *The Times* had printed most of the memorandum on March 15th, 27th, 28th, 30th, and April 17th.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

he's a rebel! WHAT WAS SMUTS? You're only a rebel when you don't succeed!) My view is that Mr. Lynch talks common sense when he says what rot to talk about 'Empire' and 'My Army' and 'My Navy'! (As he says) Why not 'MY NATIONAL DEBT'??

Here is Hansard:

'What the Government has neglected is high intellectual power, the stamp and character of a man who will envisage all these great problems of war and bring great qualities of intellect to bear upon them until he has obtained the solution. . . . *The Foreign Office has signally failed . . . there should be a complete clearance. . . .*'

3 cheers for Lynch. What we want is a Commonwealth of Nations! is what I say!!!

497: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

May 3rd, 1918

My beloved Lambert,

I'm just off to Ferne. I had a lot of visitors yesterday. In various quarters unconnected with each other there's a recrudescence of the idea of my return to the Admiralty. I ATTACH NO VALUE TO THE IDEA! As Esher says, '*the mob don't count*'! It's just two or three individuals who possess supreme power. At this moment it's Milner almost alone as autocrat and dictator.¹ Lloyd George should have taken the War Office as did Clemenceau! Admiral Fitzherbert² has been 'booted out' of the Admiralty — he had the mine-laying business! Serves him d—d well right! . . .

Lloyd George has been days in France, à la Clemenceau at the front! Winston is his dearest friend. Winston is trying to run the Admiralty, but so far the shunter has baffled him! Anything may happen at the Admiralty. Geddes has been pretty bad in bed. Crease spent an hour with me here, drank half a bottle of port, and was very mysterious! It's not yet sure whether anyone saw a single German at Zeebrugge.³ The fort raked the mole from one end, and

¹ Milner had become Secretary of State for War on April 19th (-1919).

² Rear-Admiral the Hon. Edward S. Fitzherbert (afterwards Admiral the thirteenth Baron Stafford), Director of Torpedoes and Mines, 1917.

³ The Navy's surprise attack on Zeebrugge, April 22nd-23rd, which had succeeded in partially blocking the harbour through the sinking of two block-ships.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

the German machine guns from the other end. This again may be a lie. But the champion liar at the Admiralty is on the job to make the episode rank with the siege of Troy, and dramatic art has been called in:

'Every moment had its deed,
And every deed its hero'!!! etc., etc.

Heaven guard you! *I feel acutely the death of Brock!*¹ Providence don't mean me to come back! It's bloody Fools' Day!

Yours,

F.

498: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Ferne House
May 3rd, 1918

My beloved Corbett,

... I have dictated offhand and without any consideration whatsoever about 300 pages quarto of print. It's not literary — it's only me talking — *just talking!* and all just as things come into my head and in no ordered sequence — a kaleidoscopic arrangement! And you could shake up the bits of glass and perhaps get quite another effect!

¹ Wing-Commander F. A. Brock, who had lost his life in the Zeebrugge operation. From a letter Fisher wrote to the press on April 25th, but did not send: 'Why are we always anonymous about our heroes? and especially these young ones? This one's name is Brock! He was anonymously lauded by Sir Eric Geddes in the House of Commons as largely responsible for the efficacy of the operation at Zeebrugge. A reliable German account (apparently official) says that Brock's artificial fog at Zeebrugge (and especially in the second attack on Ostend, when the *Vindictive* was sunk) was very effective, and that the Germans found it impossible to see anything ...

'But Brock had greater plans than Zeebrugge, and a few minutes before he took his last journey he came to see me ... to take counsel with me, so that is why I do specially mourn, with his Country, at his grievous loss to us, for he could have been of momentous service! I think I would sooner have done without Zeebrugge, as, after all, it was a minor operation compared with what Brock had in his mind, and told me of! Besides, it was "tip and run"! We did not capture Zeebrugge and remain there, which was the original conception of November 1914.

'Let us be grateful that Brock has lived and has so materially assisted in keeping the Germans busy instead of the Germans keeping us busy, and more especially in dealing with these exits of the German submarine, instead of looking for them, like a needle in a bundle of hay on the wide ocean! When you have a plague of wasps, you take the wasps' nest, you don't go hunting individual wasps with butterfly nets! (But that's another story, as Mr. Kipling says.)

'Finally, let us pray that our present unprecedented sea supremacy may yet help our Army in its dire distress, and our stomachs as well, for they too may soon be in dire distress also.'

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

I have in my mind 3 portions — one now just completed (but I've not yet looked at the first proof), the second portion later, after the War, if I live so long — the third portion after death for daws to peck at! It's all absolutely haphazard. Sometimes I think it's galvanic, but mostly I think it's *DRIVEL*!! If you telephone to Phillips, he will send it you by hand for you to look at if you have leisure. I've enough for another volume type-written, and ten large tin boxes hold papers for the third volume, after death, if any sufficiently indiscreet publisher for them can be found! (Probably an American!) The present volume is just milk and water! PAP! Why do I send it you?

- (1) Because you're the most beautiful writer I know.
- (2) Because you'll candidly tell me, 'Burn the beastly stuff!'
- (3) Later I shall only give it to 100 friends only as secret.¹

Yours always,

Fisher

499: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Ferne House
May 17th, 1918

My dear Winston,

Yesterday I climbed a precipice 1000 feet above the sea and walked six miles, so I am fit! This to allay your fears in case you think I am debilitated in saying what I am about to say!

On Wednesday, April 10th last, I met you at noon by appointment with the desire of making a speech that afternoon at 4 p.m. in the House of Lords on Admirals who wouldn't fight and Generals who fought too much! However, the result of our conversation was that such a speech would be disastrous, and you would see the Prime Minister, so I refrained. Now, this morning, I have sent to me the first leading article of the *Manchester Guardian* of the day before yesterday (May 15th), together with similar articles in many other papers, asking why long ago, when it was so simple and easy before Germany had so heavily fortified the Belgian Coast — why we did not then demolish Zeebrugge and Ostend? I ask you: '*Are you going*

¹ But on May 5th Fisher wired Corbett that he couldn't send his 'fatuous drivel to the respondent [resplendent?] author of *The Seven Years' War*'. On the 9th he wrote that he would 'rearrange the "drivel"! And then perhaps you'll kindly step in!'

to have this laid to our charge when we so strenuously, in NOVEMBER 1914, pressed Kitchener to let Sir John French have two divisions to advance along the Belgian Coast in co-operation with the British Fleet? And not have 'A TIP AND RUN' episode like our present operations against Zeebrugge and Ostend,¹ *but we would have remained in occupation and have recaptured Antwerp to a dead certainty!* ['Sir French John agreed to do it and to hold the Belgian Coast!' — F.]

I have all my notes of the War Council meetings. Three times Sir John French attended the War Council on this subject, but Kitchener, after agreeing, then procrastinated, and I understood also that we truckled to the French in desisting from this project, as they were jealous of our occupying Belgium! (WE HAVE TRUCKLED TO THE FRENCH ALL THROUGH!) ['They are said each time to threaten us with a separate peace!' — F.]

If anyone has to gain by a separate peace, we have! Why do we squirm when the French threaten us with a separate peace? We have swept the German commerce and the German colonies out of existence, and not a foot of English soil is occupied by the Germans! *Why didn't we seize peace a year ago?* ['Because the French wanted the Rhine, and Carson said so!' — F.]

However, that's another story, as Mr. Kipling says! What I want to ask you is: *'What step shall be taken to clear our two selves of this charge that we neglected the capture of the Belgian Coast when it would have been so simple and easy in November 1914?'* May I make a personal statement in the House of Lords when it reassembles in ten days' time? Will you kindly ask the Prime Minister? *I have not embarrassed him hitherto.* I've no doubt whatever that, had he been able, he would have had me back at the Admiralty. When Jephthah was expelled and exiled, he possessed his soul in patience until the time came that the men of Gilead, having tried every d—d fool [to lead them] and failed, were forced to ask him to return. (See the 11th Chapter of *Judges*, and the 7th verse.)

I guess the leading article in the *Manchester Guardian* — very forcible — is written by Mr. Sidebotham,² whom I greatly admire, but his failing is that he don't understand that the Dreadnought is a necessity! 'OUR CITADEL OF THE OCEAN'!

¹ There had been two unsuccessful attempts to block Ostend — on April 22nd-23rd, as part of the Zeebrugge operation, and on May 10th.

² Herbert Sidebotham, on the editorial staff of the *Manchester Guardian*, 1895-1918. He was, incidentally, entrusted by the Admiral's literary trustees, after his death, with the task of preparing his biography; but pressure of other work forced him to give up the project early in 1928.

When I wrote, a year before the War, that this war would be a war of young officers in submarines and destroyers and aircraft, nevertheless I did not disparage the necessity of a citadel! *An ocean citadel!* ['Our great battle dreadnoughts have got to roam the ends of the earth and the wide ocean. Submarine battleships are coming, of course, but not just yet.' — F.]

Kindly get me permission to make a speech in the House of Lords.

Yours,

Fisher

. . . These recent attacks on Zeebrugge and Ostend are heroic and magnificent, '*mais ce n'est pas la guerre*'!¹ We run away. We lose 6 ships more wanted for a vital operation. We lose irreplaceable heroes! It's 'tip and run'. We want: '*J'y suis, j'y reste*.'²

500: FROM WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Ministry of Munitions of War
Whitehall Place, S.W.1
May 19th, 1918

Private

My dear Fisher,

Very glad to get your letter and its abundant evidence of your health and energy.

I spoke to the P.M., as I said I would, and he referred very kindly to you and expressed a desire to meet you at breakfast or dinner. This he would no doubt have done but for the crush and scramble of events. Why don't you go to see him? He would welcome you. But give a little notice.

I don't think you lost anything by not making your speech. A speech from you is a card that you must not play improvidently. It should be a long written statement, *grave, measured, impersonal*. And

¹ 'C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre' ('It is magnificent, but it is not war'), the remark attributed to Marshal Canrobert on viewing the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava in the Crimea, September 20th, 1854.

² 'J'y suis, j'y reste' was General MacMahon's remark at the capture of the Malakoff redoubt in the Crimea, September 8th, 1855.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

the moment as well as the topic must be rightly chosen. You do not want to get 'Mauriced'.¹

I do not think the *Manchester Guardian's* criticisms require an answer. We did all in our power in the autumn of 1914. But I increasingly feel that the troops which French had would not have been sufficient or anything like sufficient; and I agree with you that no operation there without troops will yield first-class results. On the other hand, the inconvenience has turned out to be less than we apprehended. The Belgian coast is not the base of submarine warfare, but only a handy advanced base. The Elbe and the Ems are their real bases — always have been, always will be.

I agree with you that the Navy does not render a full return for the drain it makes on our resources. It could do much more. But the successes they are having (thank God) in choking submarines are now becoming very remarkable, and Zeebrugge has given them back the *panache* that was lost at Jutland.

The past is full of sadness and the future of anxiety. But to-day Bank Holiday! in my sunlit garden I have the joy of the present. May it be yours also.

With my best regards,

Yours very sincerely,

Winston S. Churchill

501: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Ferne House
May 26th, 1918

My dear Winston,

You really have sent me an excellent letter! I don't agree with you, though! Had the British Army been on the sea flank, as it should have been according to common sense, we should have turned the German flank. And had we gone to the Baltic, the collapse of Russia would not have occurred. We ought to have equipped

¹ Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, Director of Military Operations, Imperial General Staff, 1915-1918, had had a letter published in the press (May 7th) challenging the statements made by Lloyd George (April 9th) and Bonar Law (April 23rd) respecting the strength of the army in France at the time of the great German offensive in March. On May 9th Maurice's charges were answered to the satisfaction of the House of Commons, which overwhelmingly voted against an inquiry into Maurice's charges. Maurice, put on retired pay by decision of the Army Council (May 14th), promptly accepted the position of Military Correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle*.

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Russia before we equipped ourselves. Remember Napoleon's dying words at St. Helena — page 177 of Rosebery's *Napoleon* — that if we went in for a big Army on the Continent, it would be our downfall! Our Navy is a cipher to what it should have been! The British Army is a projectile to be fired by the British Navy! I wrote that in an article for Esher in 1903 'On the British Army'! If I published that article now, it would be an 'eye-opener'! and I should be shot at sight! And Sir Arthur Lee, K.C.B., M.P., called the Grand Fleet '*eye wash*'!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

I feel sure of Lloyd George's kind intentions, but I hate '*knocking at the door*'! When I'm wanted — *if ever* — I can be sent for like Jephthah was!

502: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

June 9th, 1918

'Do this thing!
Take the Kings away . . .
And put Captains in their rooms'
(*I Kings*, Chap. 20, Verse 24).

My dear Lambert,

I wrote to a distinguished friend to note (but not to congratulate him) that he had been made 'a Companion of Honour' (what that is I don't know!) and told him one of the disadvantages of even a 'Limited Monarchy' was the making of us all into Christmas trees to hang decorations upon! He replied he had declined it, as [he] 'did not wish to be regarded as a dab of paint to camouflage this new order instituted for Labour leaders'!¹ Haven't I always told you we are a nation of snobs, and that even the Labour leaders don't resent being kept hanging about on the door mat?

My dear friend adds: 'I feel sure your conception of Democracy

¹ Sir Frederick Treves it was, and he had written (June 7th): 'I found that the order was for Labour leaders who — by reason of their calling — could not take a knighthood. A few big names were being added in order to camouflage this precious order. As I did not wish to be regarded as a dab of paint, I declined.'

will be realized.' (I had sent him my paper on Democracy that you didn't like!)¹ '*Liberty means a country where every man or woman has an equal chance* [Fisher's italics]. The race of life in a civilized country is a race carried out under a system of handicaps, and the people who do the handicapping are the people of the least brains.' 'The prophecy you send me is wonderful.'² I think the words of this my friend will interest you, *though perhaps not convince you!*

Yours till death,

F.

503: FROM SIR JULIAN CORBETT

Offices of the War Cabinet
June 12th, 1918

Dear Lord Fisher,

So many thanks for letting me see this. Aston said I was to send it back to you, but some day you will let me have a copy perhaps.³ As usual, you touch the spot. I wept when I knew our whole Expeditionary Force was going to France, and felt what it would mean, and how Pitt would turn in his grave. Perhaps, as Germany had got the initiative so completely, it could not be helped; but there is the cause of tears all the same. When the time came to strike amphibiously for a decision, we had nothing to strike with. This first chance, as you saw, was at the Dardanelles, and once a decision obtained there we

¹ The paper on Democracy had been dictated by Fisher on May 25th. It is to be found in *Some Notes by Lord Fisher for His Friends*, pp. 130-5, and, in slightly different form, and with omission of references to Sir Ivor Philipps and Jellicoe, in *Records*, pp. 69-74. The original ends: 'Napoleon's maxim was "*La carrière ouverte aux talents*". Are we ever going to adopt it? Not till we sweep away kings!' The last sentence was omitted in *Records*.

² Fisher had, in December 1908, prophesied that the Government would 'be led by our anti-Democratic tendencies in High Places, and by Compromising Attendances of Great Military Officers at the French Manœuvres at Nancy, into a sort of tacit pledge to France to land a British Army in France in a war against Germany, then would come the biggest blow to England she would ever have experienced . . . a deadly blow to our economic resources and by the relegation of the British Navy into a "Subsidiary Service"'.³

³ 'General Aston, R.M.A. (now employed under War Cabinet) stopped me in the street yesterday (I having kicked him out of the Admiralty as an obstructive in 1909) [but Aston had been in South Africa, 1908-1912, and, previously, had served at the Staff College, Camberley] to say how he yet worshipped me all the same, and to say how well he thought me looking. In return for this Christian spirit, I gave him what I had in my pocket, written a few minutes before while waiting to see a friend. He took it off to Sir Julian Corbett there and then . . .' (Fisher to Lambert, June 13th, 1918). The document in question, entitled 'The Strangest Thing in the War', emphasized the neglect of 'the great amphibian opportunities' in the war. 'The British Army was meant to be a projectile to be fired by the British Navy, and to be landed, as in Frederick the Great's time, where most injurious to the enemy!'

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could have passed to the final one in the Baltic. Oh, these blessed Germanized [British] soldiers with their 'decisive theatre'. Couldn't they see that in Pitt's great war, the best one ever fought, the decisive theatre was Havana — not France.

It is a lamentable tale for me to tell. How can I say all that is in my mind? I think of Nelson, and Saumarez after him, in the Baltic, and weep again. It is the most bigoted 'soldier's' war we have ever fought, and this at the end of all our experience. Why didn't I devote my life to writing comic opera, or collecting beetles? I might just as well. But now my fate is to tell the stupid story of the war as it is; not, alas, as it might have been. I had hoped when you came back, but already the soldiers had entangled us too far even for you to drag us out. We deserve each other's pity.¹

Yours sincerely,

Julian S. Corbett

504: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

June 18th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

The greatest value of the letter you enclose² (and which I return herewith) lies in its advocacy of UNIFIED naval and military advice given to the CENTRALIZED War Cabinet! — CENTRALIZED ON THE WAR! (this War Cabinet with NOTHING BUT THE WAR to think of!). The disastrous history of this War is due to the political government of the Country being guided by plausible outsiders with '*the gift of the gab*'

¹ 'How kind of you to write me so excellent a lament! Your pen is exquisite!' (Fisher to Corbett, June 15th, 1918). Brian Tunstall, the naval historian and Corbett's son-in-law, has suggested 'the possibility that in his letter Corbett was rather overemphasizing the views expressed in order to fall in with Fisher's mood. I hardly think that in 1914 he was *quite* so strongly opposed to sending the B.E.F. to France as is suggested. Maybe, however, his earlier misgivings increased as the war continued and the Dardanelles opportunity was lost. All this is mere surmise' (letter to the writer, March 6th, 1955).

² General Maurice had written Lambert on June 15th: 'I will study Lord Fisher's paper carefully . . . Things are in such a mess in France at present that it is beating the air at present to advocate any other course than strengthening our forces there to the utmost of our capacity, but if I get an opportunity I will certainly see if I cannot impress the importance of using our sea power in combination with our land forces. I see the Government are putting up a weak compromise to meet the demand for a change in the organization of the Cabinet. I hope you will be able to rub in that a War Cabinet composed of the heads of the Foreign, Military, Naval and Air Departments, with nothing but the war to think about, is what is required, and that this Cabinet must have *unified* Naval and Military advice. Anything short of this is useless.'

butting in with 'side shows', and *thus drawing away and diffusing our strength!* instead of concentration on the DECISIVE AREA!

It is written that Lord Kitchener always read the criticisms of Mr. Sidebotham ('The Student of War' of the *Manchester Guardian*). Last Saturday, Mr. Sidebotham tells the truth about Germany's success in the War being founded on 'surprise' and 'rapidity'. (Read the *Manchester Guardian* of Saturday last, June 15th, 1918.) You will find in some of the extracts from my lectures to the officers of the Mediterranean Fleet in 1899 to 1902 (while I was Commander-in-Chief) that I quote Napoleon as stating repeatedly that the ONE WORD in war was 'CELERITY', and I quote Nelson's anticipation of this saying of Napoleon (*Napoleon stole a lot from Nelson!*), when he answered the old lady who asked him how it was he always won the victory. '*Madam, by ALWAYS being THERE one quarter of an hour before the other feller.*'

And as to surprise, as quoted by Mr. Sidebotham, I have over and over again reiterated, in those long past days and since, that the only way to beget 'SURPRISE' is for 'AUDACITY' to go to bed with 'IMAGINATION'! And so it was we sent Admiral von Spee to the bottom, and all his Squadron! It was not a victory, but it was what Nelson said he preferred, 'annihilation'! There has been neither *audacity* nor *imagination* in this War, and so we have not had '*surprise*'! And instead of '*celerity*' being our watchword, Lloyd George, in his famous speech, said it had always been 'TOO LATE'! (14 times 'too late' he quoted in his memorable speech when he was still Chancellor of the Exchequer!)

As I think I said to you once before, that should so calamitous an event occur as a British 'Sedan', it would be a sure prelude to the victory of our arms, for the Navy would once again come into its right place, and the British Army, replaced in France by the American Army landing at Bordeaux or Marseilles, would then surprise the Germans by being landed by the British Fleet at one or all of several points — vital and decisive! Hitherto our troops have always gone where the Germans expected us and had prepared for us. The transcendent power of the British Navy has, in this war, been utterly ignored! *Our ancient amphibian policy cast out!*

Again, 'The Air': In my letter to the Prime Minister dated July 11th, 1917, I said 'THE AIR WILL WIN THE WAR'. You have that letter! *Send it to your friend!* I won't reiterate it, though '*Reiteration is the secret of conviction*'. ('Pears' Soap is the best.' At last you buy a cake of the beastly stuff!)

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Some great man wrote that all our history was a record of a nation of lions led by asses, and it was when other nations thought us damned that the common people rose up and won! But I attribute our always coming out on top to another cause! **WE ARE THE LOST 10 TRIBES OF ISRAEL!!!** No other reason suffices to account for our now being the greatest nation on earth after giving up Heligoland, Corfu, Minorca, Tangier, Curaçao, Java, Sumatra, Delagoa Bay, and the Argentine!

We now want a Cromwell to dismiss an effete House of Commons, and to bind all Kings in chains and the Nobles with links of iron (Psalm 149, Verse 8).

Yours,

Fisher

505: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Board of Invention & Research
[late June 1918]

My beloved Lambert,

I will be as silent as the grave in regard to your having seen Maurice! *But what a revelation!!!! One fifth of what was asked for last autumn!!!* Surely that ought to be brought out in view of the 'NINE A MINUTE'! being massacred in France of our very best and bravest and youngest!!! Any d—d fool can see we should have taken the offensive and so spoilt the German plans, but we adopted the *very worst* plan in war, which is the '*defensive*'! No mistake about it that even now we can win the War if we land the American Army in Bordeaux and take all the English Army into the Baltic (3 places!) and Jutland coast, four feints, any of which can turn into a reality, *which is what the Germans are now doing in France!* For even now they might push for Abbeville or for Calais, whilst Foch¹ is concentrating on the *Rheims front!* Smuts said the end of the War was in sight, and so did Jellicoe, and that probably damned the situation last autumn! Well! AGITATE! AGITATE! AGITATE! AND GET OUT THE TRUTH!

Yours,

F.

¹ Marshal Ferdinand Foch, in supreme command of Allied Forces in France since March 1918.

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506: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Ferne House
June 29th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

At this moment I can't put my hand on my 'aircraft' letter and memorandum which PRECEDED the letter to the Prime Minister of July 11th, 1917, and which Mr. Sutherland (Lloyd George's Secretary) himself heard Lloyd George read out to the War Cabinet at noon that day! And came out of the room and told me so! My point was that both by sea and land the aircraft were going to 'dominate the War'! And curiously enough my memorandum at sea [sic] has come true already, inasmuch as the *Furious* has now an Admiral aboard of her and she is the Flagship of the 'FLYING SQUADRON' (he carries no end of seaplanes aboard of her!), and her own vast and unsurpassed speed of nearly 40 shore miles an hour, and her very light draught of water, enabling her to go into the shallow waters of the German coast, peculiarly emphasizes what I had before written. (And how I was gibbeted by asses for building these 5 marvellous fast battle cruisers!!! *Renown, Repulse, Furious, Courageous, Glorious!*) N.B. What a different 'FLYING SQUADRON' to that commanded by Admiral Dale, which was suddenly put into commission by the English Admiralty when the German Emperor sent his famous telegram to Kruger in the Boer War!¹

However, it's the LAND war that just now predominates, with the fear of a British Sedan held up before us! '*The incontestable mastery in the air governs the military situation at this moment.*' (Big italics this should be in!) Should the approaching military collision in France and in Flanders lead to a great retreat, one side or the other, THEN (*this is the 'dictum'!*): 'No such huge masses of millions of men can make good a retreat simply on account of rations and supplies, IF THE AIRCRAFT ARE MASSED WITH AN INCONTESTABLE MASTERY!'

Yours till death,

Fisher

And the end of the War will be like the 'Last Trumpet'! STARTLING AND SUDDEN!!!

¹ At the time of the Kruger Telegram crisis of January 1896, a particular service squadron (or 'flying squadron') had been commissioned, ready to go anywhere and do anything. It consisted of 2 first-class battleships, 2 first-class and 2 second-class cruisers, and 6 destroyers.

July 7th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

I return you Maurice's letter. What a hideous light it throws on the conduct of the War that such a man should be relegated into being a newspaper hack, and his income reduced to a pittance! . . . I told you Winston wrote to me to take care not to be 'Mauriced'!

Billing, though a lunatic (*as was Gordon*), may yet lead the masses to burn down No. 10, Downing Street, and hang Milner as a German! Sir Something Speyer was so very thick with all the governing politicians that there may yet be a great exposé! I believe he's in America now. I heard yesterday from America that the feeling is getting very intense over there about our softness towards the enemies in our midst!¹ . . .

Yours always,

F.

508: TO MRS. GERARD MEYNELL²

Twatley
Malmesbury, Wilts
July 14th, 1918

My faithful E. H. M.!

Yes! I know it! An essay 'On Age in relation to Strategy Conjoined with Youth in the Field of Action' is ready (like Minerva out

¹ N. Pemberton Billing, Independent M.P., 1916-1921, had created a scene in the House of Commons, July 1st. Though ruled out of order, he persisted in his attempt to initiate a debate on the internment of enemy aliens and had to be forcibly removed. Gordon was, of course, Lord George Gordon, responsible for the 'Gordon Riots' in 1780, which aimed to force Parliament to repeal the Bill passed in 1778 for the relief of Catholics. Sir Edgar Speyer, Bt., P.C., was of German birth. On July 6th Fisher had written Lambert: 'Billing may be mad, but he has the masses with him over the Germans in our midst. An American aviator told my daughter almost unbelievable stories of his pointing out Germans with houses painted white at regular intervals up the Thames. The answer he got was that "anyone could paint their houses any colour they liked".'

² Mrs. Meynell had, since the spring, been helping the Admiral (at Ferne House) to arrange his papers for the book he was doing. Twatley was the home of the Neelds. On one occasion he wrote her: 'My dear Esther, I think enclosed might go in the documents. Are you boldly eradicating the trash? Honestly, I think more every day that it is all drivel! Tell the truth and shame the Devil! (The devil is me!) and say "Burn the whole d—d lot!"' 'Yet,' Mrs. Meynell writes, 'when I ventured to suggest that this should be left out, that the other was perhaps a repetition, he would immediately exclaim with a grieved expression, "But that's the best thing of the lot! That's real Bovril!" Even the Admiral was not exempt from the weaknesses of authors!' (Meynell: *A Woman Talking* [London, 1940], p. 84).

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of the head of Jupiter), born in full perfection, now ready to emerge on dictation. And the text so apposite from 'Childe Harold':

'Oh! For one hour of blind old Dandolo
Th' Octogenarian Chief — Byzantium's Conquering Foe'!

and put in Justinian's Generals, Belisarius and Narses, who did those Big Campaigns at over 70! However, splendid old Dandolo was 90 years old when he captured Constantinople, with a diversion at the Dardanelles en route!

But, alas! all this struck down by Lady Fisher here at the point of death with heart failure, and I only with hope — all others (*doctors included*) without hope, but I say, *Dum spiro, spero!* I have 3 times (*largo intervallo*) been at the point of death, and know the spirit can command the body, and when Lady Fisher smiled on me sweetly, when I whispered her to get well, I felt reassured and so go on hoping. She is perfectly conscious, perfectly peaceful, perfectly painless, and perfectly comfortable, but cannot find the words she wants, and so it is truly pathetic the dreadful guessing till she nods approval. The death of the Righteous is beautifully described by that wonderful Saint, Jeremy Taylor, in his *Holy Living and Dying*, and I am witnessing this great example!

I have not a moment for more.

Yours,

Fisher

...

509: TO THE DUCHESS OF HAMILTON

[mid-July 1918]

Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his!¹

Certainly this is now being exemplified here! A most saintly life and 'the Dying' as portrayed by Jeremy Taylor in his immortal book on *Holy Living and Dying!* . . . Last night the Doctor took the drastic step of injecting an opiate, as such another night as the previous one, restless and breath-troubled, well meant death, but death is also risked by the sedative's action on the heart. *Without it death was sure!*

¹ Balaam: *Numbers* xxiii, 10.

BOARD OF INVENTION... 1917-1918

So it was right, the alternative! Now at 4 a.m. we await the issue! *She is sleeping soundly!* BUT WILL SHE EVER AWAKE??? . . . I hear the Angel of Death! After all, Death is an Angel to the '*Summoned One*'!

'Till then I would Thy Love proclaim
with every fleeting breath
And may the music of Thy name
refresh my soul in Death.'

In those old holy pictures . . . the Angels are shown taking the dying Saint with sweet symphonies to the heavenly home! '*the Mansion*' (*St. John*, 14 Chapter, verse 2). . . .

F.

510: FROM QUEEN ALEXANDRA

Marlborough House
July 21st, 1918

My beloved Admiral Fisher!

No words of mine can possibly describe how deeply I feel for you. I sympathize with you in your terribly sad and irreparable loss of your beloved and devoted wife, and simply cannot bear to think of you without her! who indeed was everything to you for 52 blessed years! God give you strength to bear this heavy trial and deepfelt sorrow! . . .

Your devoted friend,

Alexandra

511: FROM VISCOUNT ESHER

Roman Camp
Callander, N.B.
July 21st, 1918

My beloved Admiral,

Memories of the old days crowd upon me, and I have thought much of you and the dear girls these last few hours.

What wonderful times we had, and dear Lady Fisher always so gentle and sweet to me and to every one. It all seems far away, and

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

yet so near. Where should we all be to-day, were it not for your foresight, your bold determination, and the atmosphere of Portsmouth, in which *she* had so large a share.

I read lately all your old letters to me, and lectures and things, including your correspondence with A. J. B. Really, the prophets were not in it with you. And what a story the whole thing would make, from those far away times when you and I — unknown to each other — were pulling at dear old Stead.

My dear, you have had a glorious life, and if there is such a thing as Fame, you have earned it. But you remember Browning's lines:

'How the minute grey lichens, plate o'er plate,
have softened down the crisp-cut name and date.'

In these days Nelson himself would have had a monument no higher than the shoulder of Lord Curzon of Kedleston.

Well, bless you, my dear friend, and give my love to the children. You have all mine, as you know.

Esher

512: TO JULIAN S. CORBETT

Twatley
July 22nd, 1918

My beloved Friend,

I loved your letter! She had all her desires! She married a 'boy' Lieutenant who was penniless and friendless, with the blood of the Plantagenets in her veins, and left him with a coronet and covered with his flag of Admiral of the Fleet at her death! Solomon portrays her:

'Her children rise up and call her blessed; so also her husband,
and he praiseth her.'

She had a painless illness of only a week, was fully conscious, and had all she loved around her. . . .

Yours,

Fisher

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513: TO SIR WILLIAM WATSON

July 26th, 1918

Dear Sir William Watson,

Your dear and kindly telegram very grateful to me. A great shock, a totally unexpected heart failure after never an illness in all her life. She had no suffering, only a few days ill and a heavenly death, and fully conscious of us all around her, and left with a smile (I suppose she saw the Angels denied to our eyes.) . . .

Heaven bless you both for thinking of a mourner!

Yours,

Fisher

For myself I am fit and ready, but alas! they think my years too many! A Persian poet says: 'A decrepit camel can still carry the burdens of many asses'!¹ (And there do seem loads of Asses!) Dandolo was 90 when he captured Constantinople! . . .

514: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

Hamilton Palace

Hamilton, Lanarkshire

August 13th, 1918

My beloved Friend,

Sir John Jellicoe, when he was First Sea Lord, told the Country how he entreated the Prime Minister not to make optimistic speeches about the destruction of the German submarines, as invariably there followed a necessity for abasement! Such seems the case again just now, following the Prime Minister's statement in the House of Commons on August 7th, of 150 German submarines since the War began 4 years ago, for this works out at only an average of $3\frac{1}{8}$ German submarines being destroyed *monthly*, whilst it was officially stated months back that our spies were able to assure us that from 3 to 5 German submarines were being produced weekly. So now, accordingly, what purport to be official communiqués are now appearing in

¹ This was the legend that he put under the frontispiece photograph of himself in *Some Notes by Lord Fisher for His Friends*. The caption immediately beneath the photograph reads '1917. Admiral of the Fleet'. Actually, it was a 1904 photograph (reproduced in *Fear God and Dread Nought*, II, frontispiece), but with Fisher's writing on the original, 'J. A. Fisher, 1904' (see frontispiece, *Memories*), blacked out!

all the newspapers that the Germans really have very few submarines now left, to which the plain and irrefutable contradiction is supplied by the continued prodigious destruction of British shipping, which it is impossible to deny!

As stated in the leading article of the *Pall Mall Gazette* of last Thursday (August 8th, 1918), we are officially informed that so far as the United Kingdom is concerned, we are still losing more ships than we are constructing. Mr. Hurd points out (*by the quotation of official figures*) in the *Daily Telegraph* of August 10th that the Germans have destroyed nearly 8½ million tons of British shipping, *and it is the fact* that British mercantile shipping is being weakened now still at the rate of *ninety thousand tons a month!* 'Four years of failure!' (That's the headline of Mr. Hurd's article!) *And where, then, is Sir John Jellicoe's prophecy of the German submarine menace being at an end this month?* Lord Pirrie has accepted the responsibility for finding a solution of the predominant war problem of the day. IT SURPASSES AND OVERSHADOWS ALL ELSE IN THE WAR!

Alas! Alas! Our blind guides cannot see it, and the British Public, led by these blind guides, are both falling into the ditch! And Mr. Macnamara, the Admiralty representative in the House of Commons, replies to Mr. George Lambert, 'I cannot say!' when asked by Mr. George Lambert this vital question, 'Are any skilled men being recruited at the present time from the shipyards for the Army?' Imagine not being able to deny so damnable a proceeding with indignation! Some 20,000 skilled shipbuilders were promised to be returned from the Army long since, *but they haven't been!!* Mr. Roch, M.P., in the House of Commons, asks the same Macnamara, 'Are not the 12,500 men, said to have been returned from the Army, quite unfit for work in the shipyards?' And the Admiralty representative's reply is, 'I cannot say in regard to their grade'. He don't answer the specific charge, and so presumably Mr. Roch is correct! The National Shipyard Scheme employs 7,000 men besides German prisoners of war, without the prospect of producing a single ship this year. And the skilled shipbuilding labour vital for the private shipbuilding yards is disastrously lacking — *and the Army simply won't return this skilled shipbuilding labour as ordered!* One thing is sure — our mercantile predominance is passing away. Schwab and Hurley¹ have so established shipbuilding on all the coasts of America, east

¹ Schwab had been appointed Director General of the Emergency Fleet Operation of the U.S. Shipping Board in April 1918 (-November 1918) — that is, head of all shipbuilding in the United States, with unlimited authority; Edward N. Hurley, Chairman of the U.S. Shipping Board and President of the Emergency Fleet Corporation, 1917-1919.

and west, and even on the Great Lakes themselves, that our one sole cause of world predominance in the past is gone! Gone beyond recall!

Yours,

Fisher

515: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Ferne House
August 29th, 1918

My dear Winston,

Recently *The Times* summarized the various military expeditions we had in hand from the Murman Coast in the icy regions of the Arctic to the counterpart of ancient marches to Baku! (With Palestine and Mesopotamia and Salonika thrown in!) *It adds up to a big figure!!* Of course you guess at once what I'm coming to!

Of course you'll say at once (*like those gentlemen in St. Mark's Gospel*), if I once more, at this crucial epoch, urge a landing of an army in Pomerania,

'And when His friends heard of it they went to lay hold on Him; for they said: He is beside Himself'!

But read this Dutchman's account of how the German power for fighting remains still unabated (LARGELY THROUGH OUR EFFETE FOREIGN OFFICE), and presently you'll come up against a series of fortifications in France that will necessitate catacombs! So, why not do the commonsense dodge and *get behind them!* *And then the Navy at last comes in!* To land a great army on the Pomeranian Coast is a practicable proposition, and with a Navy five times bigger than the enemy's, it is easy!

Your mercantile navy is still being destroyed faster than replaced! Jellicoe's vaunt of the German submarine being conquered in August is being falsified!

More hecatombs of our youth and strength will be vainlessly piled up in France!

Do entreat the Prime Minister to 'sack the lot' who now weight him down, and let us go to war in the good old way and turn the German flank, instead of fighting him just where he wishes us always!

I feel like Ezekiel among the captives by the River of Chebar, when he saw visions and learnt that in the heavenly places

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'Whither the spirit was to go they went, and they turned not when they went.'

Yours,

Fisher

516: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
September 6th, 1918

My dear Lambert,

...
Yours,

Fisher

After the police, the next strike will be the Navy! I know the British sailor to his very core! He has been my study all my life, and I have a deep affection for him. The sailors are not now being properly engineered, and the authorities will have a mutiny as sure as fate! Everything given them is always done with reluctance and after such pressure as quite takes away the value of the concession, *and it rankles!* Macnamara is an ass of the first water and does not realize the volcano any more than the gold-stripe people!

Lord Esher has an article on me in September number of *National Review*! FANCY MAXSE ALLOWING IT! Esher never told me — and the *Morning Post* calls me a patriot!¹

Yours,

F.

517: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

36, Berkeley Square
September 26th, 1918

Private

My dear Lambert,

... SECRET. Sir Sothern Holland and Sir H. Ross Skinner have adopted my view that we shall never get 'forrader' [make progress]

¹ Esher's article, 'Notes from Old Diaries, 1901-1909', was reviewed in the *Morning Post*, September 2nd: 'The paper teems with references to the great men of that period and to the efforts of patriots like Lord Roberts and Lord Fisher to awaken the Governments of that day to the German menace which they then foresaw.'

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with inventions until the organization is actually in the Admiralty Building and half a million sterling spent in Stokes Bay in a central laboratory, so the Third Sea Lord will take my place with a 'Director of Research' over him, and I am booted out! Hoist with my own petard! '*Ave Geddes Imperator! Morituri te salutant!*' The gladiators used to say that as they marched into the arena before the Roman Emperors prior to killing each other! . . .

Yours ever,

'The Falling Star',
not the 'Rising Sun'.

518: TO SIR ALFRED YARROW

Hamilton Palace
September 29th, 1918

My beloved Yarrow,

I enclose you a very inadequate account of what you wished for, and the writer so afraid that he won't allow me to mention his name! It's very curious this terrorism of silence! We are the most despised nation in the War through our leaders being imbeciles! You (ages ago), I remember, endeavoured to correct it, and sent masses of publicity at your own expense to all quarters! *The German submarine menace still rages!* And our building tonnage remains far below the destroyed tonnage! But the Public and the Press and Parliament remain unmoved by the terrible consequences that MUST come!

The sea is camouflaged by the land! The shortest route to Berlin is still by the sea. It's the ONLY route to the end of the War! No doubt if we had a sapient Foreign Office we could 'rope in' Bulgaria and the Turks, but we have imbeciles! We are still 100 miles from Aleppo and 100 miles from Sofia, and invincible lines of forts and obstacles between us and the Rhine, and we are only now where we were on March 21st last, when we lost 160,000 British soldiers taken prisoners, and we lost also incredible masses of stores and munitions, and Haig's dispatch never published why it was!!!!

Give peace in our time, O Lord!

Yours,

Fisher

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

519: TO ADMIRAL JOHN MORESBY

October 5th, 1918

Copy of a bit of news sent by Lord Fisher to a friend, but the matter yet being profoundly secret, he entreats your discretion under D.O.R.A. [Defence of the Realm Act] to avoid his incarceration in a lunatic asylum.

N.B. 5 per cent ahead of your time — a genius
10 per cent — a crank
15 per cent — a lunatic!

F.

Private and Confidential

An Admiralty Committee was designed and formed to curse Lord Fisher's scheme of 1902 of homogeneous training of executive and engineer officers. The Committee has blessed it *in toto*, by a report dated August 3rd, 1918, and the Admiralty have accepted now finally and ultimately the whole d—d scheme!!

'And so may the Lord always blast our enemies and confound their devices'!

(*P.S.* The prayer is after an ancient model improved by Cromwell.)

520: TO WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

19, St. James's Square
London, S.W.1
October 14th, 1918

My dear Winston,

I am so sorry you did not come here last week in continuation of our conversation (*which I hope remains in your mind*), that were I commanding the German Fleet you would have a hell of a time in the Channel — your reinforcements stopped — your Mayors and your Corporations in a panic — and America mourning some hundreds of thousands of her troops at the bottom of the Atlantic, and could I not refuel (as so easy with oil), I should intern my German Fleet in

BOARD OF INVENTION...1917-1918

Spanish ports, where Maura (the Spanish Prime Minister) just kicked out because too English!

The loveliest bit of camouflage in this War is putting up Prince Max of Baden and tame Socialists to lead us to think that Germany is tottering to her fall!!!!¹ We have not struck at a vital spot in Germany. Not a foot of her territory in Germany in our hands. German Armies occupy territories that are not theirs. The German submarine menace shows no sign of lessening. Germany has AT LEAST (yes! AT THE VERY LEAST) twice as many submarines as we have! The German submarine campaign is going to be more intense. (Viscount Jellicoe said it was going to be finished with last August!!!! And heaps of asses have been seeing the end of the War!) NO! WE HAVE NOT YET WON! We may have to go through long weary months yet! (*That is, on the present system !!*)

The shortest way to Berlin is by the sea. The quickest route to end the War is by the sea. Geography and Strategy have not altered since Frederick the Great sent for a bottle of poison when the Russian Army landed on the Pomeranian Coast some 90 miles from Berlin, but the Russian Empress died and he sent the bottle back to the chemist.

We can still land an Army in the same spot! (D—n!!!!)

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. Bismarck insisted on marching the German Army through Paris before he dictated peace. Ever since then the French have been a peace-loving nation! So will the Prussians, if we also march through Berlin before we dictate peace.

As I told you, war is '*imagination*' and '*audacity*', and when these two copulate, the result is '*SURPRISE*'! And so we sent von Spee to the bottom! And so we could get to Berlin. For God's sake, don't have a peace with the Germans holding the Rhine, or a single German colony returned to her! SUBMARINES!

¹ On October 4th the liberal Prince Max of Baden had been named Chancellor and Foreign Minister, with the support of the (Catholic) Centre, Progressive, and Socialist Parties. On the same day the German and Austrian Governments appealed to President Wilson for an armistice.

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918
521: TO ARCHIBALD S. HURD

(I've left Berkeley Square. This is my new address.)

19, St. James's Square
October 16th, 1918

Secret and Private

Dear Hurd,

I've just read your excellent article of yesterday (Tuesday, October 15th) in *Daily Telegraph*. Curiously enough, on Monday evening 'an important personage', who was going to dine *tête-à-tête* that night with Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Staff, came to see me to get the naval heads of a memorandum for Lloyd George to take over with him to Paris yesterday (Tuesday) morning. Having had the naval terms of peace formulated in my mind (AND ALSO IN WRITING) so long ago as October 21st, 1904, I had no occasion to delay my response for any consideration of what those terms should be! And so this memorandum was given to Lloyd George accordingly yesterday, Tuesday, October 15th, 1918.

Lord Fisher's 'MINIMUM':

- (a) The surrender of the German High Sea Fleet intact to England.
- (b) Ditto, *every German submarine*.
- (c) Ditto, Heligoland, Sylt, and Borkum.
- (d) No spot outside the Continent of Europe to be German territory, as that would mean a German submarine base.

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

I presume you have read the above!!!¹

What about Viscount Jellicoe declaring last February that the German submarine menace would be annihilated last August?

What about the tons of other asses also who have predicted that Pirrie would build faster than the German submarine would sink?

¹ Three newspaper extracts, all of October 15th: *The Star* reported Geddes as appealing in New York, October 14th, to America to expedite the construction of destroyers and anti-submarine craft, asserting the U-boat menace was greater than ever; *The Times* quoted the German Captain Persius as predicting a 'substantial increase in [U-boat] strength' shortly, which would not force England to her knees, but which would be enough to cause the most serious damage to Allied shipping; the *Daily Mail* quoted the *Rhenish Westphalian Gazette* as saying it had good reason to believe that the submarine war would reach 'its climax during the winter and will produce in the Entente countries an economic crisis of unanticipated dimensions'.

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What about Schwab building a mercantile navy for the United States that won't be quixotic after the War, but will usurp the seas!

522: TO LORD INCHCAPE¹

19, St. James's Square
October 18th, 1918

Dear Lord Inchcape,

I presume to interpose in this most disastrous controversy as to the criminal idiocy of those responsible for the vital loss of our mercantile shipping supremacy, because, in November 1914, when I was First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, I went to Lord Kitchener and demanded of him there and then an order to his subordinates to cease enticing away men from our shipyards, and told him I would resign that day at 6 p.m. my post as First Sea Lord and give my reasons in the House of Lords. (*Write and ask Mr. George Lambert, M.P., for confirmation of this!*) He wrote the order there and then, without hesitation. But alas! a flabby, effete, apathetic set of philosophic doubters succeeded to the government of the Navy in May 1915, and grass grew in the corridors of the Admiralty! And associated with the British Admiralty was the most rotten Foreign Office of modern or antient times, without the courage of a louse or the backbone of a slug, which damned the splendid work of our sailors in their stopping every cargo to Germany, and the Foreign Office orders to release these endless cargoes of sustenance for Germany nearly caused a mutiny in the Fleet!

I said '*disastrous controversy*' in the first lines of this letter because neither Press nor Parliament nor the Public in the very least appreciate the immensity of the appalling disaster that must ensue by our losing our former magnificent and unquestioned supremacy in mercantile shipping. Notice, please, that not a single paper even mentions your most admirable and most conclusive letter in *The*

¹ The first Baron (afterwards first Earl) Inchcape, chairman of the committee appointed to agree on the rates of hire for vessels chartered by the Government, 1914-1919; President of the Chamber of Shipping of the United Kingdom, 1903, 1918, 1919. Enclosed was a newspaper extract datelined Washington, September 4th, and headlined: 'Ship delivery record broken. 66 vessels, aggregating 340,145 tons, for August, exceed highest British total [for monthly wartime production].' The story concluded: 'Her yards, most of them new and only now arriving at big production, finally have passed the British yards in monthly output, and though England's total for the year so far is greater than America's, by the time the year is done America should be in first place.'

LAST YEARS, 1915-1918

Times [October 18th], except the *Westminster Gazette* calls you practically a d—d fool! Tories and Radicals are equally blameable, and equally apathetic. We have left off being a sea nation and become what the great Napoleon said would be our everlasting ruin if we became a great military power! HE WAS RIGHT! . . .

Yours,

Fisher

. . .

523: TO GEORGE LAMBERT

October 31st, 1918

'Betrayed'
(*By One Who Knows*)

The Germans want an armistice so as to have their soldiers to shoot down their republicans at home, who are now moving triumphantly in every village and city both in Germany and Austria-Hungary! *And Bohemia is actually now a republic!!!* BUT THIS IS WHAT THE WAR IS FOR! *'Government of the People, for the People, by the People'!!!* The official report yesterday states that the Germans are dropping tons of peace leaflets amongst our soldiers at the front and especially over the Americans at Verdun! *But the republican fire has been kindled and won't be put out!!!* This is not 1848! *The masses know better now!* But we have to see to it at once that we don't force Bolshevism in England! Why? Because the very same interests and the very same influences are now at this moment at work in England as kept the pro-German King of Greece upon his throne, and then put his son in his place, *instead of a republic as desired by the Greek nation*, and gave him £20,000 a year of English money to live luxuriously in Switzerland and still plan and intrigue against the Allies. It's a subterfuge to say it is not English money! We supplied the money to the Greek Government to enable them to pay it! The Germans officially state the Armistice is to be on equal terms! Why have we not all along replied: 'If you want an armistice, send a white flag in the usual way, and Foch will deal with you!' *The reason is that by acting as they have, the Germans have duped us!* Haig has been 4 days in London and now 4 days in Paris! *Who is directing the fighting in France??* Is Foch fighting the Germans? Or is he at Versailles fighting worse than Germans? *No doubt, a man's foes are those of his own household!* The German people

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are calling for the abdication of Emperors and Kings, but England is stopping the way! But our autocrats will be sold! There will be another Russia in Germany! Let us pray it won't spread to England. Ireland is there already.

*Go on with the War.
Keep fighting.
Stop talking.*

As Foch says: '*Why Armistice? I've got 'em!*'

524: FROM GERARD FIENNES¹

Symonds Hotel
34, Brook Street, W.
November 11th, 1918

My dear Lord,

I must send you a line to-day. The Victory is a Victory of Sea Power. *You* made the Fleet; *you* mobilized it; *you* planned the strategy of Falkland Islands, and, whoever else may forget your part as the Organizer of Victory, I do *not*.

The war for which you prepared the Empire has been full of disappointments to you, and crowned with sorrow. But Clio sees with clear eyes, and in the future will see you righted. The praise of contemporaries is a small thing compared with the considered judgment of mankind, and of that verdict you are secure.

If you had been the Barham of this struggle, I believe it would have been over long ago. But that is all past, and we have attained the end. So we can afford to let by-gones be by-gones.

Every single thing you did has been justified by results.

Warmest congratulations to the Organizer of Victory.

As ever yours,

Gerard Fiennes

¹ Fiennes, the naval journalist and old friend of the Admiral. Fisher received a great many kind letters of this sort after the Armistice. A number of letters also appeared in the press.

19, St. James's Square
November 12th, 1918

My dear Friend,

In accordance with your desire, I send herewith copy of my views of the conditions of an armistice (*solely from the sea point of view!*). You will observe it was written and sent forward on Trafalgar Day! It appears on that day began the German Navy mutiny (*so the German sailors now tell us*), and Sir Eric Geddes said at the Mansion House that the Admiralty knew it for certain. Alas! where was '*the Nelsonic touch*' that would have sent the British Fleet bounding to Wilhelms-haven and Cuxhaven to gobble them all up when disintegrated and disorganized! How such a Second Trafalgar would have stirred up our soldiers on the Western Front and blasted the Huns! SENNACHERIB'S HOST WOULD HAVE BEEN ALL DEAD CORPSES! like as when '*the Angel of the Lord went out, and smote [in the camp of the Assyrians] an hundred four score and five [thousand], and so when they rose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses*'.¹

However, please read my lament enclosed! I ain't sure my new book of my life's experiences just finished won't rival the lamentations of Jeremiah! Yet withal I admit the workings — YES! THE GOOD WORKINGS OF PROVIDENCE!!! Mr. C. P. Scott (the proprietor of the *Manchester Guardian*) wrote me a few days ago saying that had my strategy been adopted, the War would have been over two years ago! YES, IT WOULD! But then he lovely adds: 'At that date we would not have got rid of these Emperors and Kings!' HOW TRUE!!!

For peace, we want republics! No one man, no set of men, can in a republic make war! Let's have a Cromwell! 'To bind their Kings in chains, and their Hindenburgs with links of iron'! (Psalm 149, Verse 8.)

These are the words of Reventlow² (yesterday, November 11th, at Kolding): 'It is incredible that the English Fleet should not have run into the German harbours, as there was no one to prevent them'!

Yours,

Fisher

Postscript. The French have got the Rhine! The Italians more than

¹² *Kings* xix, 35.

² Count Ernst zu Reventlow, Pan-German journalist and author, who had vigorously supported the unrestricted U-boat warfare policy.

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their wildest dreams! The Russians are saved! The Americans will have Constantinople! (*still the key of the world*), and an Army (*which by no other means could they have got!*) to conquer Mexico and annex South America, and have filched from us our mercantile shipping supremacy! Where do we come in???

526: TO SIR ALFRED YARROW

Hamilton Palace
December 8th, 1918

My dear Yarrow,

. . . May I ask you to read the first article in *Blackwood's Magazine* for December 1918, entitled 'For Women', by a Woman. I've sent my copy away. *It ought to be printed by the Government and given to every man, woman, and child who speaks English throughout the world!* Lord Bryce, a pro-German, was Chairman of the Government Committee to enquire into German outrages, and dreadful as Lord Bryce's report is (*and ALMOST UNREADABLE as it is!*), yet he states that much was omitted, 'BECAUSE IT WAS UNPRINTABLE.'¹ Remember the German Army is a civilian army! *The whole manhood of Germany passes through the German Army*, so it was NOT the scum and dregs of Germany that perpetrated these most awful horrors of crucifying little children, and cutting off women's breasts after violating them, and taking one thousand girls of 15 years of age to violate them and who became mothers, and one instance of 400 children of 10 years old violated and infected with syphilis.

Yours,

Fisher

¹ The first Viscount Bryce had presided over a Commission of Inquiry in the autumn of 1914 'to consider and advise on the evidence . . . as to outrages alleged to have been committed by German troops during the present war, cases of alleged maltreatment of civilians in the invaded territories and breaches of the laws and established usages of war'. The *Bryce Report*, which had a great influence on world public opinion, had concluded that excesses had been committed in order 'to strike terror into the civil population and to dishearten the Belgian army'.

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527: TO SIR ALFRED YARROW

Hamilton Palace
December 13th, 1918

My dear Yarrow,

... You are wise about the electrical developments in America being studied by your son. There is immense progress in the U.S.A. The internal combustion engine also wants your attention. It's going to oust all others for commerce ships. Schwab has laid down 30 such ships, I hear! Their economy is prodigious, and their crew so small. Also the oil production of the world is going to be fabulous, because it will pay to turn coal into its constituents, of which fuel oil a considerable percentage. In 1885 I was called 'an oil maniac' at the Admiralty! I was called a maniac and lost my promotion in 1860 because I said masts and sails would go!

Yours,

Fisher

528: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Hamilton Palace
December 19th, 1918

My dear Arnold White,

... WE STOPPED THE WAR TOO SOON! We must occupy Berlin. As Mr. [Theodore] Roosevelt says, we must have the Kiel Canal and Heligoland. We must take their coal mines and their potash. We must

'Bind their Kings in chains
And their nobles with links of iron'!

Psalm 149, verse 8.

'The Freedom of the Seas' is summed up in that ancient saying!

'La raison du plus fort
Est toujours la meilleure'!

Cromwell was a pious man. Cromwell said 'The Fear of the Lord — and a broomstick'! It's the broomstick that does it!

Yours,

Fisher

...

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529: TO C. P. SCOTT

Hamilton Palace
December 23rd, 1918

Dear Mr. Scott,

... My Notes for my hundred best friends are now complete! (*Profusely illustrated with indiscretions!*) But not yet issued to anyone, pending consideration of libel actions!

Yes! King George arranged my omission!¹ (I forgot to add that Ramsay MacDonald and Mr. Smillie are also coming here, and I am to join the Labour Cabinet. This is very piquant!) It's curious that no newspaper or public speaker mentions that the dramatic and, as Lloyd George publicly stated, the totally unexpected and dramatic collapse of the War did not occur through a Waterloo or a Sedan or a Trafalgar! No! It was a case of Sennacherib's Army! *The Almighty did it!!!* ...

Yours,

Fisher

530: TO ACTING VICE-ADMIRAL WILLIAM S. SIMS

Hamilton Palace
December 29th, 1918

My dear Sims,

I enjoyed your kind remembrance of me in sending me a Christmas card. I have none to send in return, so write you a line! I consider you have done immense service by your outspokenness! When you came to see me at Admiralty House, when I was Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, I wrote down you would be a great man. SO YOU ARE!

What President Wilson has to do is to establish a great federation of the free nations who speak our common tongue! A BIG COMMON-WEALTH OF FREE REPUBLICS! THAT would ensure peace!

Yours till Hell freezes,

Fisher

All Kings and all secret diplomacy must be swept away! THIS IS VITAL!!!

¹ The King had omitted any mention of Fisher or his work in his victory speech to Parliament, November 19th. Jellicoe and Beatty were the only two naval officers mentioned by name.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920¹

THERE is little to be said about Fisher's last eighteen months, 1919-1920. He revived his pre-war project of an Anglo-Saxon 'Commonwealth of Free Nations' to preserve the peace, and, late in 1919, contemplated a visit to America to promote it. This project was one of the themes in his many letters to *The Times* during the last year of his life — exuberant explosions of a man in retirement.² With the prevision which had guided him throughout life, he foresaw that the crisis of the war would be followed by an economic crisis, and that economy in government was necessary. Other themes, all ahead of contemporary thinking, were the desirability of Irish freedom, profit-sharing by industrial workers, all-round cancellation of war debts, and the importance and role of air power in the future. The war of the future would be in the air and under the sea, not on the land or on the sea. But his views here were too extreme. 'Air fighting possesses possibilities of sinking all manner of surface ships so effectually that submersible vessels will be a necessity.' '*Air fighting dominates future war, both by land and sea . . . by sea the only way to avoid the air is to get under the water. . . . That's why I keep on emphasizing that the whole Navy has to be scrapped. For nearly a whole year after the Armistice we are spending 140 millions sterling on a scrapped Navy.*'³

In the same series in *The Times* (September 13th, 1919) he speculated on where the future battleground would be, and here he may have forecast somewhat less fancifully. 'Asia, which of old in one direction sent forth Moses and his multitude, will produce

¹ The details of Fisher's last months may be found in a booklet, *Sunshine and Shadow* (1920²), printed by the Duchess of Hamilton for private circulation. I am indebted to these gentlemen for writing me personal appreciations of Fisher's significance: the late Sir W. Graham Greene, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Osmond B. de Brock and Admiral Lord Mountevans, Admiral the Hon. Sir Reginald Plunkett-Erle-Drax, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Oliver, and Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield.

² I have included the more interesting *Times* letters.

³ 'Lord Fisher on the Navy', *The Times*, September 11th, 12th, 1919. In all Fisher did six articles for *The Times* (September 8th-13th), mainly on the changes made in the Navy between 1902 and 1910, and their effect upon the war. *The Times* printed 15,000 copies of a ha'penny reprint of these articles. 'I am', the Admiral wrote Moresby on September 11th, 'overwhelmed with masses of enthusiastic letters about *The Times* articles . . .' But see Admiral of the Fleet (ret.) Sir Arthur Fanshawe's letter in *The Times*, September 20th, 1919, for a general criticism of the articles.

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another Exodus into Europe and into the Western Hemisphere from the borders of the Pacific. *That ocean holds the future. Every fourth baby born into the world is Chinese.*'

In September 1919 the Admiral dictated a 200,000-word manuscript for Hodder & Stoughton. At his suggestion (September 22nd), two volumes were made of it. The first, *Memories*, appeared on Trafalgar Day ('my star in the East'), and the second, *Records*, on December 8th, the anniversary of the Falklands. The publication dates, it goes without saying, were those chosen by him. These volumes were not, strictly speaking, autobiography. Rather were they a combination of autobiography, prophecy, and rambling reflections, all marked by vividness and candour.¹ Both volumes were quite successful: 15,000 copies of *Memories* were printed and sold (the book went out of print in 1934), and 7,500 of *Records* (out of print in 1939). There was also an American edition of 2,300 copies of each book. Total royalties paid amounted to approximately £4,000.²

Fisher invested some of the royalties in a Monte Carlo holiday early in 1920. Never had he been in higher spirits. Upon meeting the famed opera singer, Madame Melba, he proposed to her. 'I accept at once,' she declared. 'I would give up the stage any day for you!' Thereafter she called the Admiral her 'fiancé'! It was on this holiday that he was stricken with his fatal illness, cancer of the prostate gland. It began with a sore throat on March 5th. 'Rheumatic pain' developed the next day. On March 12th he and his party left Monte Carlo for England, instead of going on to Rome, as originally planned. He underwent operations on March 17th and March 25th; two others followed in April-May. They were unsuccessful. Before the first he wrote a characteristically thoughtful and incisive note, whose envelope was marked '*Private for Mr. Kidd*', the surgeon. The outside of the note read: 'PRIVATE. To be opened when necessary.' The message itself:

¹ Upon the news of Beresford's death, the unflattering remarks on him in *Memories* were removed from the manuscript. '*De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*' Also omitted in the final draft was this reference to Jutland: 'A fleet, magnificent, five times bigger than the enemy, and takes no risks! A man I heard of - his wife, separated from him, died at Florence. He was on the Stock Exchange. They telegraphed "Shall we cremate, embalm, or bury?" "Do all three", he replied; "take no risks!" Some of our greatest warriors want the birds so arranged as to be able to put the salt on the tail.'

² The sales figures were obtained from the publishers in 1956. But Fisher, on February 1st, 1920, mentioned a sale of 30,000 copies. (See Letter No. 582). I am at a loss to explain this discrepancy.

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Undertakers

W. Garstin & Sons
49 Wigmore Street
London, W.1
Telephone Mayfair 843

The nearest cemetery
No flowers
No one invited except relatives
No mourning

Words under tablet at Kilverstone Church as arranged in memorandum in my writing case.

His physicians expressed surprise that a man in his eightieth year should still have been alive after four severe operations in rapid succession. Indeed, on June 6th he was sufficiently recovered to go into the country, to his beloved Ferne. For one week there was hope, but persistent neuritis and sciatica prevented him from regaining his strength and he became gradually and steadily worse. Another operation was found necessary. On July 8th he returned to London, to the Duchess of Hamilton's home at 19 St. James's Square. The operation took place the next day, and from it the patient never completely regained consciousness. He was barely conscious, a few hours before he died, when the Duchess whispered in his ear the words he had made her promise to whisper to him should he be dying: 'O Lord, in Thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded.' He brightened up for a moment, then, soon after, at 7.15 on the morning of July 10th, he passed away.

The final hymn which was sung during the simple and beautiful funeral service in Westminster Abbey on July 13th, as the body lay in solemn state, was entirely appropriate:

'Now the labourer's task is o'er,
Now the battle-day is past;
Now upon the further shore
Lands the voyager at last.
Father, in Thy gracious keeping
Leave we now Thy servant sleeping.'¹

¹ The extremely touching story of the funeral service that appeared in *The Times* of July 14th is reproduced in its entirety (but for the omission of the names of the distinguished congregation) in Bacon: *Fisher*, II, 311-15. Excerpts appear at the end of my introductory chapter.

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The Admiral was cremated, and his ashes were buried in the old church near Kilverstone Hall. For a memorial all he had directed was that his name should be inscribed under his wife's on the tablet he had erected to her in the church, with the words: 'Who hopes, through the mercy of God, to be united with her in spirit hereafter.' On his gravestone were the words he had chosen (*Proverbs* xxii, 29-31):

Seest thou a man diligent in his business?
he shall stand before Kings,
he shall not stand before mean men.

And on the foot-stone were the words, 'Fear God and Dread Nought'.

How are we to sum up this remarkable man and his career? Some essential clues are contained in a letter of Lord Esher's (July 11th, 1920):

I heard late last night that poor dear old Jackie had gone aloft. Well, he had many crowded hours of glorious life and few men have ever enjoyed the press and lull of battle more than he. He elbowed his way through love and war with a directness and self-confidence that never blenched at any obstacle. He and Stead were fighters, but clean fighters, whatever their beaten enemies may have said. They were both men of strong intellectual passions, a bit ruthless, but ever seeking the truth and finding it oftener than most men. Jackie was a Maccabean — a true believer in the God of Battles, in the Jahveh of the ancient Hebrews. His Bible was the Old Testament, which he knew by heart, without a dash of the New in his disposition. . . .

Jackie, I am sure, never hurt a human being, in spite of his being a Son of Thunder, but he was according to the lights of the hypocrite both a publican and a sinner. Anyhow, he could both love and hate strongly; but both his love and hatred stopped short of action. It was a pure intellectual exercise! In the web of which his character was woven the threads were of many colours and they ran crossways in many directions.¹

Fisher was neither a typical Englishman nor a typical seaman, but he was unquestionably a man of genius and vision, and one of the

¹ M. V. Brett and Oliver, Viscount Esher (eds.): *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher* (4 vols., London, 1934-1938), IV, 262-3.

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most colourful men in England of modern times. As a matter of course he provoked the hostility of a large number of naval officers, but he fearlessly pursued the policy which he thought right in the best interests of the country. He had much in common with the great St. Vincent: a cool and inflexible determination, a whole-hearted devotion to the service, and a constant thought for the interest of the lower deck. Like Nelson, he had very human weaknesses; but, like Nelson, behind both his strength and his weakness, the driving force of his life was a single-minded love of his country and desire to serve her.

Fisher was possessed of amazing powers of foresight and work, and a burning desire for reform that questioned everything that was obsolete or inefficient. He had a real genius for seizing on new ideas, especially as regards matériel — ships, guns, etc. His sweeping changes were on sound principles, even if some of them (as in the scrapping of obsolete ships after 1904) were carried to an extreme. He was right far more often than not.

Important achievements prior to 1904 include his important role in the agitations of 1884 and 1893 for a powerful fleet, and the introduction of the water-tube boiler when he was Controller in the 1890s. During his first tenure as First Sea Lord (1904-1910) there was, to mention only the more important items, a much-needed reform of naval entry and education (announced in 1902, when he was Second Sea Lord), including the establishment of special schools for the Navy at Osborne and Dartmouth and the recognition of engineering science as the foundation of the modern navy; a drastic reform of the dockyards; a revolution in the design of capital ships; the wise concentration of naval strength in home waters; the beginning of the conversion from coal to oil; the nucleus crew system, which converted sham reserves into efficient warships; the very important gunnery reforms (with the collaboration of Sir Percy Scott); the development of the submarine; the improvement of the pay, food, and status of the lower deck (in which the Admiral took particular pride); and the building up of an unchallengeable strength numerically. To be sure, the Navy paid a price for the reforms: the split in the Navy brought on by the drastic nature of many of the innovations and some of the methods used to put them through. In the Churchill period, pre-war (1911-1914), Fisher had an important influence in the matériel and oil policies, and in earmarking Jellicoe for the supreme command in war. He was, in a word, a great naval administrator, as well as a great Englishman and a fascinating person,

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and the Fleet which, in 1914, was in most respects at least the equal of any in the world, was largely *his* Fleet.

A seer of signs, few had he read amiss
In those blind days ere yet the strong Foe braved us.
Ah, be his epitaph, dear Mourner, this —
He built the Fleet that saved us.¹

Of his second tenure as First Sea Lord, only this need be said: the imagination and drive at the Admiralty disappeared the day that Churchill and he left Whitehall, together with any serious challenge to the insularity of Haig, Robertson, and the other inveterate 'Westerners', who devoted so much of Britain's energy and resources to land warfare. This departure from the traditional amphibious strategy urged by Fisher (particularly after the Dardanelles failure confirmed the belief of the generals that successful amphibious operations against fortified positions were not possible) may well have been Britain's fundamental strategic error in World War I.

Although the Navy won no Trafalgars, its role was in the end decisive. As the instrument of the tight blockade, it brought Germany to her knees through economic pressure. The humiliating and ignominious surrender of the flower of the German Fleet on November 21st, 1918, was, in the last analysis, due to Fisher, since the modern Royal Navy was his work and his monument. Certainly he was, at the least, one of the leading figures in the final triumph. It would, therefore, have been gracious and fitting had the authorities ensured his presence at the surrender. But such an act required imagination, and an appreciation of Fisher's services which many in high places at the time were not prepared to concede. His utter neglect by high authority at this time of national rejoicing must have hurt him profoundly, although there is scarcely a trace of it in his correspondence.

The name of 'Fisher' will for ever be connected with the Royal Navy in its greatness, and the historian can safely accept the judgment of *The Times* in the last paragraph of its eloquent tribute:

Till within the last weeks of his long and bellicose life, Lord Fisher was a stormy petrel, bringing the tempests he rejoiced in. Behind him he had, at first, no one; behind him, he had, in

¹ From Sir William Watson: 'In Memory of Lord Fisher', *Nineteenth Century*, September 1920.

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these later years, the whole, solid affection and admiration of the people. And yesterday morning the people in its silent, stolid reverent British way wrote its affection and admiration for 'Jacky Fisher' upon the social history of our time.

It was a sight which none that saw it can ever forget. Only the funeral of King Edward, Lord Fisher's devoted friend, could match it. . . . [The route of the funeral procession] was flanked at every yard, every inch of the long way, by crowds upon crowds of the English public, bareheaded, still, reverently paying their inarticulate homage to the great man, the great child, the ruthless foe, the wholehearted friend, the dark schemer, the open fighter, the 'ruthless, relentless, remorseless' tyrant, the perfect playfellow, who had spent his huge strength and his genius in their service, and whom they had learned to trust, to love, and to mourn.

Let the schoolmen say what they will — such was the inevitable reflection of all who saw the impressive sight — this man's fame is safe with history. The people knew him and loved him. His body is buried in peace, but his name liveth for evermore.

531: TO SIR ALFRED YARROW

Hamilton Palace
January 3rd, 1919

My beloved Friend,

Your telegram was 'sweeter than honey or the honeycomb'! (*This is the Duchess's message!*) We are having a wonderful visit from Mr. Moody, the American Evangelist.¹ (Look out for hearing of me preaching at street corners and the Duchess with a tambourine!) I wish you'd been here as intended! We are coming up again on February 15 for a few days, in case you are up in these parts, but the five crimson-clad parlourmaids won't be here, nor will the 'state jewels' be in evidence, so you'd have to rough it with 12 housemaids! and a still-room maid instead of a cook — *but she is very nice!*

¹ Paul D. Moody, American Presbyterian clergyman, later President of Middlebury College (Vermont), 1921-1942.

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Our love to you all.
Yours till the Angels smile on us,

Fisher

This is a 'Moody': 'The Devil tempts many, but the lazy man tempts the Devil'!

532: TO SIR EDWARD GOULDING

Hamilton Palace
January 11th, 1919

My beloved Edward,

I'll compose a letter to dear Garvin in accordance with your wishes, and so regret the misadventure as regards the invitation, for it was pure kindness of heart on the part of the Duchess that dictated a solitude here as congenial to Garvin in his grief.¹ It's a huge palace, bigger than Buckingham Palace, with a park 3 times bigger than Hyde Park, and the ideal spot for a man in grief and sorrow, because such lovely surroundings to catch his mind and soothe his thoughts.

I've just had two munificent offers of thousands of guineas to write just prefaces or a single article on the War. I'VE DECLINED! 'wishing neither to wrangle with the living — nor asperse the dead.' (*I think that rather neat!*) *Par exemple*, the sawdust would pour out of Kitchener's reputation! And Balfour would be exposed, though now a hero, as the Dictator of YOUR party!

Bless you both! I LOVE YOU DEARLY.

Yours,

F.

...

533: TO ADMIRAL SIR REGINALD HENDERSON

Ferne House
January 28th, 1919

My beloved Henderson,

Your letter has this moment reached me and as usual to hear from you is to me a great delight. It's very curious that in to-day's

¹ Garvin had recently lost his wife.

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Daily Mail it states that the Americans are going to copy the five fast battle cruisers I laid down, *Renown*, *Repulse*, *Glorious*, *Conqueror*, and *Furious*, which were so blackguarded and kept back from completion after I left the Admiralty. And in yesterday's *Daily Mail* is the submarine with 12-inch gun that I designed off my own bat in August 1915, but it was turned down for a year or more, but now alive and kicking, alas! too late, but greatly praised, and five days ago the *Daily Mail* lets out the secret of the battleship carrying 20-inch guns and 40 miles an hour speed, which was all worked out and the model made, but that also cancelled when I left! Such is life! But it's no good repining! And the War is over, so no good talking about the past! . . .

Heaven bless you for writing me such a treasured letter.

Yours,

Fisher

534: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Ferne House
January 30th, 1919

My dear Arnold White,

. . . Yesterday I walked 10 miles — yes, ten good miles on the hard high road, and didn't feel a bit tired! So I don't feel my eye to be dim nor my natural force abated! . . . that Moody you met [went] straight to a publisher, a Mr. Robert Scott of Paternoster Row, to make me an offer; but I've declined. Also I've declined another munificent [offer] since I last wrote you. I don't feel it a suitable time, and the Public have got peace and they don't care a d—n about the past! The top-hat has come back and surpassing luxury again reigns in Mayfair, with nightly dancers jostling each other, and Albert Hall extravaganzas! And they are eating and drinking and giving in marriage! and after Gray's immortal 'Epitaph'.¹

'Melancholy has marked me for her own' to see the Revolution insidiously working its way in our midst, and Ireland in rebellion and our Rulers giving away everything in Paris! And the Germans being let loose in masses in our midst. This is what may move me in a moment of exasperation suddenly to get up in the House of Lords

¹ That is, after all the war-dead. This seems to be the applicability of the memorable epilogue to Gray's 'Elegy': 'Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth, A youth to fortune and to fame unknown,' etc.

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and 'let fly'! Impulses come from Heaven! I hate premeditations! A prepared oration is an abomination to me! Still those who get on are the people who prattle fools [foolishness?] and chronicle small beer!

Yours,

F.

After Easter I am going to Italy, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot'.

535: TO ADMIRAL JOHN MORESBY

Ferne House

February 7th, 1919

My dear Moresby,

. . . There was a leading article in *The Times* that the annihilation of von Spee had not yet been properly commented on! and the history of it remained to be written. Such a history would damage Jellicoe and all else concerned, for they one and all opposed me, and I have Winston's really fine letter to me afterwards that '*Alone I did it!*' *But peace has come!* and no one wants now to denounce the living or defame the dead! and revolution is stalking through the land! (THE NATURAL REACTION OF ELECTING A TORY PARLIAMENT BY A TRICK!)¹

When Mr. Asquith wrote to me on Sunday, May 16th, 1915, begging me to suspend my judgment of the day previous, as he had dissolved his Government, he then shattered irretrievably not only himself and his party by forming a Coalition Government, but he became thereby quite unwittingly the arch-priest of Bolshevism in this country, and what we are now experiencing in strikes and an approaching revolution is SOLELY due to him. *Bonar Law and the Tories were equally culpable and blind!* for they will be also shattered! Had the Baltic Project gone forward in July 1915 (*as planned and completed*), the War, as C. P. Scott rightly has written, would have ended that same year; but Balfour, who had ruined his Party,

¹ The 'Khaki Election' of December 14th, 1918, had returned the Coalition Government, minus its Labour segment (-1922). The Coalition had two-thirds of the seats in the House of Commons, but 70 per cent of them were held by Conservatives. As for the 'trick', Fisher must have meant the calling of an election directly after the war, at a time when the Government was bound to be popular.

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succeeded in ruining his country, and he persuaded the War Council to plunge into the Dardanelles instead, and the great armada of 612 vessels prepared for this great enterprise was misused and massacred!

He (Balfour) is now giving his country away in Paris in the 'League of Nations' and in the 'Freedom of the Seas'! Yes! He and his cousin Lord Robert Cecil! Lord Robert Cecil was the effete Minister of Blockade that permitted Germany to have a free supply of munitions of war, though every single ship was stopped by the British Fleet that essayed to reach Germany with war cargoes. Every such ship was released by the British Foreign Office and allowed to proceed to German ports direct, or else indirectly through neutral ports. The House of Cecil is now predominant at Paris! for Lloyd George is a 'talker' and not a 'reasoner'! Bonar Law has no chest and sloping shoulders!

So I suppose Horatio Bottomley¹ will shortly be our British Prime Minister! (for the Labour Party like fools are splitting!) Another Liebknecht will be bludgeoned!² and then will come the Revolution!

Our national debt when we entered the War was 4 per cent of the total wealth of the Country — it is now 40 per cent! All but the 'daily wage' class will only have one-sixth of their income both to live on and to pay all charges such as annuities, life insurance, and all other outside compulsory charges!

Yours,

Fisher

... I had written to point out to the writer of enclosed letter [Hurd] that Winston Churchill in an article (after the Armistice) in the *Sunday Herald* stated the Allies were at their last gasp when the Armistice occurred as it did as a miracle! for Marshal Foch had been foiled on the strategic flank by the inability of the American Army to advance owing to Staff failures and the unavoidable consequences of want of experience in a new Army (*immense but inexperienced — they were slaughtered in catacombs and died like flies through hospital deficiencies!*), and so the American advance on the Verdun flank was held up and Haig therefore had to batter away instead (and well he did it!). And though the British Army entered Mons, yet the German Army

¹ Horatio W. Bottomley, M.P., 1906-1912 (Liberal), 1918-1922 (Independent), journalist and company promoter, often at odds with the law.

² Karl Liebknecht, member of the extreme left wing of the German Social Democratic Party (advocating a dictatorship of the proletariat), murdered on January 15th, 1919, shortly after his arrest for complicity in the Spartacist insurrection in Berlin.

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was efficient, was undemoralized, and had immense lines of resistance in its rear before reaching the Rhine! There was no Waterloo, no Sedan, no Trafalgar (though there could have been one on October 21st, 1918, for the German naval mutiny was known! Sir E. Geddes said so in Mansion House Speech on November 9th, 1918). There was no Napoleon, no Nelson! but 'the Angel of the Lord went forth ...'

536: TO ADMIRAL JOHN MORESBY

19, St. James's Square
March 27th, 1919

My beloved old Friend,

... I've been extremely pressed to write or say something of the War: 'Jutland — a missed Trafalgar!' 'Zeebrugge — a futile massacre.' But of what benefit would it be? NONE WHATEVER! IT'S THE FUTURE WE OUGHT TO TROUBLE ABOUT!

I'll send you *Hansard* with Lord Buckmaster's speech in the House of Lords the day before yesterday.¹ I never listened to a greater speech, and yet *The Times* never even mentioned his name in the Parliamentary résumé of the House of Lords' debate. Even Buckmaster's enemies couldn't help cheering his speech, it was so absolutely splendid!

Things at this moment are as disastrous as in the worst moments of the War!

Forgive more just now.

Your loving friend,

F.

¹ The first Baron (afterwards first Viscount) Buckmaster, onetime Lord Chancellor (1915-1916), had spoken against Government extravagance (House of Lords, March 25th). 'The danger that I see is this: There are a large number of people in this country at the present time who are distinctly interested in Government extravagance (Hear, hear.) ... There are other people who realize quite well that if the Government can only be driven to further and further extravagance they will achieve their aim, and their aim is the complete destruction of the present capitalistic basis of society and the substitution of something else.' He recommended the appointment of a committee of 'the most capable men that you can find' to 'fix the total maximum amount that this country can pay for all the expense of Government and continue to survive'.

Ferne House
April 4th, 1919

My dear Lambert,

I am so glad you got in the 'BRAHMINS'! Don't let them ever forget that they did their utmost to wreck you and inadvertently put you higher thereby!¹ It looks almost as if the peace would wreck Lloyd George, but he is so astoundingly wily that at any moment he might 'chuck' the Tories and rejoin those with whom he was working in his 'Limehouse' speech!² Jellicoe's cry of 'stinking fish' has given Beresford a chance once more!³ So far as my judgment goes, Beresford should be treated with silent contempt, but anything may happen in the House of Lords. However, they'll get no word from me whatever. No doubt from January 1910 to August 1914 there was distinct retrogression, e.g. there were fewer submarines when I came back in November 1914 than when I left in January 1910, also they had reverted to coal battleships in the 'Royal Sovereign' class instead of 'all oil', etc., etc. But McKenna and Winston Churchill will no doubt look after themselves. But what a sad thing for our naval prestige in this war is all this '*fouling of our own nest*'! Really, Jellicoe ought to be shot! And now I hear Beatty is going to bring out a book!⁴

¹ Lambert had become Chairman of the Liberal Parliamentary Party, 1919-1921.

² Lloyd George's famous Limehouse speech, July 30th, 1909, delivered to an audience of poor people in east London (when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer), defended the Land Taxes and mercilessly exposed the rapacity of parasitic landowners, living on the unearned increase in land value. The speech, which made a sensation, was a landmark in the development of the 'Welfare State' concept.

³ This newspaper cutting was attached to the letter:

'Lord Beresford's Indictment of the Admiralty'

'Two motions of great importance have been given notice of by Lord Beresford, but no day has been fixed for debating them. It is to be hoped that they may be taken before Easter, though the programme in the Peers' House is rather full up to the holidays. Combined they are to this effect:

'To call attention to the present administration of the Naval service; to the lack of that preparation before the war as evidenced in Admiral Jellicoe's book; to make certain charges against Admiralty officials responsible for enormous loss of life, many thousands of tons of shipping, the danger to our food supply, whereby our existence was imperilled; and to move for a Committee of Inquiry into such charges as are made.'

Jellicoe's book, *The Grand Fleet, 1914-16: Its Creation, Development and Work*, had been published in February 1919. 'For myself, taking no notice whatever of Jellicoe's peculiarly bad book, I think the policy is that of silent contempt at this washing of dirty clothes in public, which is specially disadvantageous to our prestige in making peace and the credit of the Navy in the War!' (Fisher to Crease, April 9th, 1919). Fisher felt the same way about Field-Marshal Viscount French's book, 1914, which was first published serially in the *Daily Telegraph*, April 29th-May 27th, 1919. 'THEY ARE BOTH MISCHIEVOUS! and private dirty linen ought not to be washed in the public laundry!' (Fisher to Moresby, May 13th, 1919).

⁴ Beatty never brought out a book.

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It delights me very much that you now occupy a position of influence and magnitude that no office under Lloyd George could have given you. Such are the workings of Providence for those who 'do right and d—n the odds'!

Yours for evermore,

Fisher

538: TO A. G. GARDINER

19, St. James's Square
April 6th, 1919

Private

My dear Gardiner,

I don't recede from my position as immortally stated in *The Pillars of Society*, when, as you so eloquently put it, that my last fight was with Lord Roberts over conscription, and 'F. C. G.'¹ in a very famous cartoon in the *Westminster Gazette* made a most magnificent exposition of the situation between myself and Lord Roberts. Without doubt if the British Navy, as planned and arranged, had landed a million Russian soldiers on the coast of Pomerania, it would have killed the War as effectively as a similar incident drove Frederick the Great to the verge of suicide. He sent for a bottle of poison when the Russians landed, but the Empress of Russia died that night, so peace came as by a miracle and he sent the bottle back to the chemist. (He was a very penurious soul!) So there is my conviction plain and steadfast that Napoleon was right in what he said at St. Helena, that if ever England was tempted to become a Continental Power, she would be ruined. As I told Sir E. Grey years and years ago, and he made use of the phrase afterwards, the role of the British Army was that of a projectile to be fired by the Navy! But I have taken counsel since I saw Buckmaster and it is not judicious of me, nor will it in the slightest alter the fiat of this Tory Government that conscription must continue, so I refrain from speaking in the Lords.

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. Since writing this letter I've seen Buckmaster and said all

¹ F. C. Gould (Sir Francis Gould), the famous pre-war political cartoonist, in retirement since 1914.

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that is here and much more also and he fully concurs in my abstention to-morrow. . . . I should add that the deciding factor is that it would be just impossible on my part to avoid being forced into a disclosure of confidential matters that would be most damaging to the Country, as in a far lesser degree has been Jellicoe's book. I will have no part in raking up the past. We have got peace. So I go with Jowett:

Never explain
Never deny
Never apologize

Posterity will have it all right in the 410 quarto pages I mentioned to you, which at present are totally unfit for publication.

539: TO CAPTAIN THOMAS E. CREASE

Ferne House
April 19th, 1919

My dear Crease,

. . . Lord Esher tells me he remembers a furious meeting on December 3, 1908, of the Committee of Imperial Defence, of which he is going to send me a résumé from his notes, when I had a row with the Soldiers headed by Field-Marshal Nicholson and Sir John French as to their wanting to land in France. Of course if our Expeditionary Force, with the Fleet supporting it, had gone to Antwerp (and we should have brought Russians there also) (also with perfect ease in any numbers), *then the Germans could not have gone on to Paris!* and the Navy would not have been called 'a subsidiary Service' by Sir Ivor Philipps, M.P., in the House of Commons! On the other hand, the Soldiers would not have been made Viscounts and Field-Mmarshals.

I hear that the Germans stripped their ships before surrender of the fire-control arrangements and the smoke-producing apparatus! *Can this be true?* I was assured when I visited the Grand Fleet 3 months ago that the German fire-control and smoke-production was INFINITELY SUPERIOR to that of the English Fleet, and one Admiral told me that the *Repulse*, *Conqueror*, etc., etc. had the whole German Force completely in their hand,¹ but for 1½ hours, though within

¹ This was the Heligoland Bight action of November 16th-17th, 1917. See Letter No. 458.

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easy range, they never caught the faintest sight of the whole mass of German ships that were fleeing before them, and alas! our Admiral in command [C. L. Napier] failed to 'follow up' and was not shot! Cecil Lambert, late Fourth Sea Lord, sent me a spontaneous letter of the wonderful work of *Courageous* and sister ships on this occasion. Tell me if it's true about the fire-control and smoke being concealed from us by the Germans.

Yours,

Fisher

540: TO DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

19, St. James's Square
May 2nd, 1919

Dear Prime Minister,

I've just seen in a newspaper my name as likely to be considered as Ambassador to the United States. '*Barkis is willing*'! and I think I could do the job. I have a great number of friends in the United States and my only son married the only daughter of R. Morgan of Philadelphia.

So if no one better offers, please send me.

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. I walked eleven miles without stopping last week. . . .

541: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

19, St. James's Square
May 6th, 1919
[published on May 7th]

'A FINE OLD HEN THAT HATCHED THE AMERICAN
EAGLE.'

Sir,

The above were the words of the American admiral, tumultuously cheered yesterday by the great gathering of American citizens met to honour Josephus Daniels — not as reported.¹

¹ At a luncheon given to Josephus Daniels, U.S. Secretary of the Navy, 1913-1921, on May 5th by the American Luncheon Club in London, Fisher responded to the honoured

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The allusion to Jerusalem being preferable to Geneva may be obscure to some of your readers, but the only hypothesis to explain why we win in spite of incredible blunders is that we are the lost ten tribes of Israel. I may observe in passing that their physiognomy was not the same as that of the other two tribes, or of course they wouldn't have been lost!

Think of Heligoland, Corfu, Tangier, Minorca, Curaçao, Java, Sumatra, won by the sword, given up by the pen. And was not the armistice at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month a pure miracle? I know it! Our best general agreed with me. With the roads untouched and no resistance, it took him all he knew to get to Cologne by the fixed date!

The only parallel is Sennacherib's army. 'The Angel of the Lord went forth', and in the morning they were all dead corpses!

That's why I said 'Jerusalem', not 'Geneva'!

Somehow the war has been won beyond the dreams of Nelson. The enemy's Fleet (so full of perturbations to our most eminent experts!) not annihilated in battle, as his custom was, but locked up in Scapa Flow without a massacre, and the German Army so splendid (at the eleventh hour even!) vanished!

Yours,

Fisher

542: TO MRS. ERIC FULLERTON

19, St. James's Square
May 9th, 1919

Dearest Dorothy,

... Yes! I had a most wonderful ovation. The whole mass of them stood up and cheered and waved their handkerchiefs for a good

guest's speech with some humorous rambling reminiscences, including a few on his American visit of 1910. 'I was directed by the Admiralty to entertain an American admiral, who was a very fine fellow, and I proposed his health and turned on as much hot air as I could, but the beggar never said a word. (Laughter.) Presently one of his officers went up and whispered something in his ear. I sent the port round, and the admiral then got up, and made the best speech I ever heard. He said: "It is a fine old head that is attached to the American Eagle." (Laughter.)' Fisher then went on to speak of his pet project. '... John Bright said he looked forward to the time when there would be a compulsory peace - when those who spoke with the same tongue would have a great federation of free nations joined together - Canada, Australia, Africa [*sic*], America, and England. But they have gone and hashed it all - they have gone and made the capital at Geneva instead of at Jerusalem. (Laughter.) ...'

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5 minutes! The beauty of it was that my name was not in the list of guests and no place for me! However, they put me next the American Ambassador and Josephus Daniels, and I've promised Josephus to go and stay with him in America!!!

I suppose you saw my letter in The Times of May 6th [7th]. My speech was villainously reported, so I had to write a correction!

I do hope you'll get a French maid for Kitty. If you gave me the job, I would guarantee getting you a splendid one! Perhaps I shall bring a French maid for myself back with me from Paris! . . .

Your loving father,

F.

543: TO THE EARL OF ROSEBERY

19, St. James's Square
May 9th, 1919

Private and Confidential

Dear Lord Rosebery,

In reply to your welcome letter, I live now at above address, but am off to Paris next Thursday for an indefinite period. I'm so grieved to hear of your 'clot'!

Winston Churchill came to see me and has written to Lloyd George to send me as Ambassador to Washington! *This is private and absurd!* Of course he won't! (*I can't do him any good!*) The Americans only lost 350,000 tons of shipping, and have begged 650,000 tons of the finest German Atlantic liners that were interned in the American ports! They've done us in the eye! After all, the submarine did ruin us, as [and?] by this arrangement we lose our mercantile shipping supremacy! And mercantile shipping supremacy rules the world!

Yours,

Fisher

544: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Ferne House
June 11th, 1919

Dearest Cis,

The trip to France was most successful in lovely weather. . . . Winston Churchill lent me his Rolls-Royce for a 600-mile tour,

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mostly at 70 miles an hour, with a splendid chauffeur, who I have got the Rolls-Royce Company to take on in their employ. At the Chemin des Dames some Chinaman exploded a big shell near by, and the pieces fell all around me, cutting off the branches of the trees. The chauffeur, an old campaigner and been through the whole War, kindly told me '*he'd seen a'ead cut off like a razor by them bits of shell*'!

Lloyd George dined with me and we lunched twice with him, also Colonel House,¹ who told me America wanted me as Ambassador at Washington; but my namesake is to have it, so I hear.² Madame Stern asked me to meet Lloyd George at lunch at her house, where I had a dance and much enjoyed it. We also had a ball at the Majestic Hotel, but I only looked on there. I hardly ever have seen so many pretty Englishwomen at one time as there. . . .

Your loving father,

F.

. . . My trip to France did me great good. Never so well and fit!

545: TO ADMIRAL JOHN MORESBY

Villa Hôtel du Nord
Bad Nauheim
June 27th, 1919

My dear old Moresby,

I must send you a line of thanks for your welcome and delightful letter, written with all the youth of Bermuda in it! Yes! There will be a statue to you in New Guinea in days to come! Only yesterday I wrote to a great man in England to remind him that one of the greatest Englishmen who ever lived said that only posterity would do him justice — he had not had it from his contemporaries! For myself

¹ House, with whom Fisher had lunched on May 19th, noted in his diary that day: 'Fisher is a great old sea-dog. He talks too much but otherwise he has a good deal of charm and even more ability. I have a feeling if the British Navy had been in his hands during the war, there would not have been many German ships left to surrender.' And on August 2nd, 1919: 'Fisher impresses me more than any other British naval man.' Neither excerpt is in the published edition of *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*.

² Whichever Fisher the Admiral may have had in mind (probably H. A. L. Fisher, the historian, and President of the Board of Education, 1916-1922), it was Viscount (the former Sir Edward) Grey who, in September, succeeded Lord Reading in Washington.

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I look forward to the Day of Judgment to give some of my enemies a hot time! . . .

There are several exceeding bad omissions in the Honours' List which even as an outsider I feel very galling! I am here

‘The world forgetting,
By the world forgot’,

and making a few notes of my past life, but there will never be found anyone indiscreet enough to publish them! Perhaps a woman! Eight publishers have asked me, and one offered a cheque of a thousand guineas in advance on account! But I said ‘no’.

Au revoir, my dear old friend. Some day I will really have to come and see you. I am staying abroad for a year. You know what Dryden said:

‘Not Heaven itself upon the past has power,
What has been has been and I have had my hour’!

Yours till Hell freezes,

Fisher

546: FROM SIR FREDERICK TREVES

Thatched House Cottage
Richmond Park, Kingston-on-Thames
July 12th, 1919

My dear Admiral,

I have read your book [*Some Notes*] with the deepest interest. It is a unique book; for, so far as I know, nothing like it has ever been produced, certainly nothing so vivid, or written — as Jeremiah would say — ‘with a pen of iron and the point of a diamond’. The ordinary autobiographical notes are as a solitary candle in a dim room. These of yours are a blaze of sparks against the sky, all bright, all illuminating, but all too short.

Judged from a medical standpoint your *diagnosis* in naval affairs has been acute and accurate, your *prognosis* supernatural, and your *treatment* that of a quick surgeon who operates without an anaesthetic. By the time the screaming begins the operation is done. (There has been plenty of screaming.)

The Government evidently looks upon its high officials as a penny-

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in-the-slot machine. You stuff their salaries into their mouths and they eject pats of chocolate, all stamped and labelled to pattern. You seem to have ejected ideas which have burst the machine.

As a prophet you have advantages over Jeremiah. You have lived to see your prophecies come true. He, poor man, did not.

History will put things right and you will come into your own. There will be an enamelled plaque let into the wall of 19 St. James's Square:

'Thy voice sounds like a prophet's word;
And in its hollow tones are heard
The thanks of millions yet to be.'

I was delighted to see you looking so well. My respects to Her Grace.

Yours very sincerely,

Frederick Treves

547: TO DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

Knoll House
[July 1919]

My dear Prime Minister,

Only a few lines! An immense economy is feasible in the Navy Estimates.

I speak with authority. In 1904, when I became First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, I reduced the Navy Estimates by more millions than ever before known and yet at that very time laid the keels of the Fleet that won the War. There was no vessel in the Line of Battle at Scapa Flow at the outbreak of war that was not my design *and mine only*. Imagine, please, that at this moment your Navy Estimates provide for a larger personnel actively afloat than at the outbreak of war!

IT'S LUDICROUS! ONLY THAT IT IS CRIMINAL!

We are going bankrupt as fast as the Gadarene swine ran down that hill in Galilee! We are what the silly Tories call '*Showing the Flag*' by a multitude of squadrons all over the face of the earth!

WHAT FOR? *Is the German Fleet at the bottom of the sea or not?* It makes me weep!

Yours,

Fisher

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

548: TO ARNOLD WHITE

Knoll House
July 17th, 1919

My beloved Friend,

...
Yours,

Fisher

P.S. I intreat you to 'VANOC' the Russian situation, for there is now 'no open vision' in Israel! We want a Samuel! Lloyd George like Eli will break his neck through his two sons F. E. [Smith] and Winston at the door of the tabernacle, etc.

Lenin, a German Jew with German gold and a purely German entourage and a German Military Staff, will make Russia into a German 'dependence'! Hardly the least notice has been taken of the immense German advantage obtained by the [Bolshevik] capture of Ekaterinberg last Monday. Admiral Koltchak is done for!¹ Of what avail the League of Nations if Russia gets cemented into the German nation? We stupidly allowed the Prussians to march down to Munich and suppress the Bavarian Republic [May 1919]. What we should have done was to foster and support the South German Republic and so have two German Republics hating each other more than Christians! That's how a Bavarian hates a Prussian!

549: TO FRANCES L. STEVENSON²

Dungavel
August 20th, 1919

Dear Miss Stevenson,

I am seriously anxious that Prime Minister should appreciate that if he reduced the Navy Estimates to the extent *I guaranteed Mr.*

¹ Admiral A. V. Kolchak, leader of the anti-Bolshevik forces in Siberia during the Russian civil war, had penetrated west of the Urals early in 1919, but had been on the defensive since May. He was through by the end of the year, and was captured and executed by the Bolsheviks in February 1920.

² Afterwards Countess Lloyd-George of Dwyfor; Private Secretary to the Prime Minister.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

*Davies*¹ could be done (and ought to be done at once), it would SHAME and COMPEL (through a great wave of public clamour) all other departments of the state to reduce to some 50 per cent on pre-war Estimates. You will remember I stated to Mr. Davies that never were the Navy Estimates so reduced as when we projected and built the Scapa Flow Fleet WHICH WON THE WAR! But you must have a dictator at the Admiralty — *ruthless, relentless, and remorseless*. I have nothing to gain and a reputation to lose and I want no money, though a pauper, yet I am ready to throw myself into the breach! I've done it before. I know I can do it again! Anyhow, I'm discharging my conscience in asking you to tell the Prime Minister. We are spending two millions sterling a day more than our income! *Who on earth can fight us now?* We couldn't fight America if we wanted to! *There's no one else!*

Yours,

Fisher

550: TO SIR ALFRED YARROW

Dungavel

August 24th, 1919

My beloved Friend,

Solomon charmingly observes in the last verse of the 10th Chapter of the *Proverbs* that 'a man that hath friends should show himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother', so when you write me as you do, you come into this category! The Duchess also is moved by your message to her, but the *res angusta domi* so occupy her (you can't have seven children, seven dogs, and innumerable horses, asses, and mules, and have spare time!) — these so occupy her that I am her facile dupe in being her senile copyist and secretary! Anyhow she loves you! That's what the message is when boiled down into Bovril! I expect she'd like you to come up here

¹ John (afterwards Sir John) T. Davies, Private Secretary to Lloyd George, 1912-1922. '... unexpectedly a 30 years' bosom friend of Lloyd George's came to lunch at 19 St. James's Square, brought by Lloyd George's Private Secretary, and I guaranteed to him, in answer to his enquiry, that I would reduce the Navy Estimates by 50 per cent, but I see no reflex of this offer in Lloyd George's speech!' (Fisher to Lambert, August 20th, 1919). The reference is to the Prime Minister's three-hour speech in Parliament on August 18th. Remarkd *The Times* Parliamentary Correspondent: 'On the subject of national finance, which transcends all others in importance, he was vague and unconvincing.'

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

with Miss B. and enjoy the moors, and the high air and the grouse at the back-door and the trout close by!

We are spending two millions sterling a day more than our income and keeping up a far bigger Navy than at the outbreak of war. I wrote to the Prime Minister a month ago, but it produced no effect, and compared him and his colleagues to the Gadarene swine rushing violently down into the 'deep' of bankruptcy.

Yours till Hell freezes,

Fisher

551: TO MESSRS. BIRD & BIRD¹

Dungavel

August 28th, 1919

Private and Confidential

Dear Sirs,

I am exceedingly obliged to you for sending me the *Saturday Review*. I could not get a copy. I suggest to you to read an article in the *Nineteenth Century* for March 1919 by Major-General Sir Charles Callwell, K.C.B., who was Director of Military Operations at the War Office during the whole period of the inception, incubation, and execution of the Dardanelles Adventure. He completely disposes of the impression that the general attack by the Fleet on March 18 nearly succeeded. Sir Charles Callwell says: 'The whole thing was a mistake quite apart from the disastrous influence which the premature and unsuccessful operation exerted over the subsequent land campaign.' It is also true what Sir C. Callwell says, that 'the idea at the back of the sailors' minds (who so reluctantly assented to the political desire of getting possession of the Straits) was that it was an experiment which *could always be instantly stopped* if the undertaking were found too difficult.' But alas! 'The view of the War Council came to be that they could not now abandon the adventure.'

[Field-] Marshal Liman von Sanders, the German Commander-in-Chief at Constantinople, said: 'The attack on the Straits by the Navy alone I don't think could ever have succeeded. I proposed to

¹ This letter was prompted by one of August 24th from Admiral de Robeck, drawing his attention to a *Saturday Review* article of August 9th relating to the Dardanelles campaign. 'The personal remarks made therein concerning you and myself appear to be actionable . . .' De Robeck was putting the matter into the hands of his solicitors, Messrs. Bird, and he thought that perhaps Fisher, too, would feel disposed to take legal action.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

flood the Straits broadcast with mines, and *it was my view that these were the main defences of the Dardanelles* ['So they were!' — F.] and that the function of the guns of the forts was simply to protect the minefields from interference' (being swept, that is, by our mine-sweepers!).

However, you'd better read the *Nineteenth Century* article, and note the fact that it took Admiral Calthorpe¹ many weeks to clear a passage through the mines after the Armistice to enable him to get up his flagship to Constantinople, though assisted as he was to the utmost by the Turks.

Sir C. Callwell proves incontestably the further absolute bar because of torpedoes fired from the land, drifting mines, and invisible batteries. I believe you can hear of Sir C. Callwell at the United Service Club, Pall Mall, and possibly he would give you an interview. He was OUT AND OUT the cleverest soldier in the War, but he was shamefully ignored by Lord Haldane² (so I've been told) in favour of Lord Haldane's brother, so retired before the War! He has an incisive pen and, thank God, he uses it!

As for myself, I never have taken notice of any attack whatsoever since I was born.

I never explain.

I never deny.

I never apologize.

I always think of the greatest logician who ever lived, Archbishop Whately,³ who wrote a pamphlet completely proving that Napoleon Bonaparte never existed. He said, 'Never fight a chimney sweep. You may knock him senseless, but some of the soot comes off on you.' Nevertheless, all power to your elbow in knocking the *Saturday Review* into a cocked hat, and convey my love to Admiral de Robeck.

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Admiral Calthorpe was Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, 1917-1919.

² Viscount Haldane, onetime Secretary of State for War (1905-1912).

³ Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, 1831-1863, whose saying about chimney sweeps had long been a Fisher favourite.

[published on September 2nd, 1919]

Sir,

The two millions a day we are spending more than our income will not be saved by trifles or by trifling.

It is incredible — it is uncalled for — it is ruinous waste that the cost of the Fleet is now 140 millions a year! (In 1904 it was 34 millions!) So the whole national expenditure before the war was only a third more than the present Navy Estimates. Then a huge anti-German Fleet had to be ready to strike! Now that German Fleet is at the bottom of the sea!

Yes! Thank God, our pre-war Fleet was instantly ready and was efficiently ready to strike! But it didn't! It was the Lord that struck! There was no Napoleon, no Nelson, no Sedan, no Trafalgar! It was 'the Angel of the Lord went forth', and the German Fleet were as 'Dead corpses in the morning' (*à la* Sennacherib) when that Armistice (which annihilated Germany) was proclaimed at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918. Imagine! Here we are, getting on for a year ago, and yet spending this prodigious excess of two millions beyond our income!

I have to say from severe experience and great obloquy that Departmental Committees or Cabinet Committees or even Prime Ministers are no use in such an extremity. You must turn out the whole spendthrift crew 'neck and crop' who are responsible for this ruinous waste of money.

You must be ruthless, relentless, and remorseless! Sack the lot!

Those fearful souls who always shudder to 'Shoot at sight' and to 'Think in oceans' must take courage.

We are wasting money on half the Navy because it is obsolete already by the immense development of big, fast ships and huge guns (the last light cruiser launched has more horse-power than the *Lusitania*, and the public saw recently in the Thames the monster 18-inch Navy gun used in the war, and the 20-inch gun was ready to be built when I left the Admiralty on May 22, 1915), so half the Navy wants scrapping and the other half will be equally useless in a very few years because of the internal combustion engine and oil!

Let us all pray that Sir William Watson (our great poet) will not appeal in vain to his countrymen, in his wondrous poem 'The Doom', to retrench!

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

If the nation don't sack the spendthrifts, 'Then is the day of crumbling not far off.'

Yours,

Fisher

553: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'¹

September 3rd, 1919

Sir,
This letter is not to argue with your leading article of September 2.² (It's only d—d fools who argue!)

Never contradict
Never explain
Never apologize

(Those are the secrets of a happy life!) but I am glad to see the Admiralty have perfected all their economies, as below my letter, in your kindly insertion of it, I perceive a very remarkable official Memorandum by the Admiralty to the Fleet showing how they have time to attend to the minutest detail of battle! Like the elephant's trunk — one moment picking up a pin, the next rooting up an oak:

(1) Full dress is only to be worn by the officers of the Fleet at His Majesty's Levée. (I suppose this will be cancelled when President Smillie comes along and we make the 16th new Republic!)

(2) With No. 2 dress (ball dress) the mess jacket is to be worn instead of the tail coat!

So thank God the weight of the war and two millions a day more than our income is lifted off our minds, and we can waltz with a light heart! (Or is it still 'Jazz'?)

¹ Published on September 5th under the heading, 'Rome Burns While Nero Fiddles'.

² A *Times* leader of September 2nd, had commented on Fisher's letter published that day: 'He calls on the country to "sack the lot", and implies that if this were done expenditure would be reduced correspondingly, and that the country would pass at once from an era of prodigious prodigality to one of narrow, yet wise, economy. Frankly, we distrust these short-cuts to the millennium even when Lord Fisher presents himself as a guide to them. . . . As it stands, his letter gives the impression that the peace cost of the Navy is to be enormous, and in this, we think, it is unjust and may be misunderstood.' *The Times* cited the First Lord's assurances that drastic measures of economy were being taken, but added that the recent additions to the pay of officers and men, the doubling of the cost of naval supplies of all kinds since the outbreak of the war, and the peace problems of the Navy such as sea power in the Pacific and the development of Dominion navies — all argued against expecting any large trimming of the Navy Estimates. '... the disappearance of the German Fleet is not the end of all things for the British Navy.'

Then, Sir, there follow 12 specific injunctions about cocked hats and gold-laced trousers and midshipmen's jackets! 'Give peace in our time, O Lord!' if this indicates the minds of those whose hearts should be filled with the internal combustion engine and war 'hip-popotami' (but that's another story).

Sir, I tell you again with emphasis, the present Navy is obsolete for a war a few years hence!

Stop the money!

Yours,

Fisher

Postscript:

Can't you trust me?

(1) Was I wrong about the water-tube boiler — when the whole expert world was against me?

(2) Was I wrong about the turbine when I put it in the 'Dread-nought' — when only before in a penny steamer and the experts called it 'a box of tricks'?

(3) Was I wrong about the battle cruiser that sunk von Spee and all his Fleet — with prodigious speed and the big gun?

(4) Was I wrong about the submarine — when seven months before the war I described the sinking of the *Lusitania* by the Germans?

(5) Was I wrong to bring the Fleet from the Mediterranean to the North Sea, in humble imitation of Nelson, who said your battle ground should be your drill ground?

(6) Did the Fleet at Scapa Flow on August 4, 1914, win the war or not? Every vessel of the line of battle that was there was conceived when I was First Sea Lord.

I say with St. Paul, 'I boast myself a little'; he was compelled — so am I! 'Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also!'

Up to a certain point 'I suffer fools gladly', but I am trustee to an estate that's only going to have 3s. 4d. in the pound left. It's time to kick!

The Times takes two days to get where I am! This is by return of post.

Fisher

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

554: TO SIR WILLIAM WATSON

Dungavel

September 24th, 1919

Dear Sir William Watson,

. . . And I have another matter which is burning in my heart, and you are the only one to satisfy it, but the spirit must move you to do it or it will be surely ineffectual. John Bright had a vision long ago of a great federation of free nations all speaking the English tongue. We want a great Federation Hymn to advance this great ideal that John Bright prophetically put forward all those years ago and is now within our reach — a great Commonwealth of Free Nations! We want a great psalm like the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' by Julia Ward Howe, with a great music attached to it (as her hymn has) — the tune is 'John Brown's Body'. 'Mine eyes have seen the coming of the Glory of the Lord.' Be inspired and write it!

Yours,

Fisher

555: TO SIR EDWARD GOULDING

Dungavel

September 26th, 1919

Private and Confidential

My dear Edward,

I return herewith Lord Beaverbrook's¹ letter. I very much appreciate his kind words and kindly intentions. I have kept back a great deal against my own personal interest, so as to avoid injuring Winston at the present time (*or indeed at any time*), as with all his faults I love him. He is a fighter. He has audacity and imagination. He is a brave man!

I suggest Lord Beaverbrook should ask Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams, [Chairman] of Hodder & Stoughton . . . to have the chapter of my book now in the press on the Dardanelles, also copies of my letters to Lord Esher written at that time. . . . Further, Lord Beaverbrook might see Harold Child, Esq.² . . . who has edited my book with great judgment and success. He has left out all the d—s!

¹ The first Baron Beaverbrook, publisher of the *Daily Express*, 1917-—, and other newspapers.

² Harold H. Child, writer on *The Times* and *The Times Literary Supplement* since 1902, dramatic critic of the *Observer*, 1912-1920.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

Heaven bless you! I don't want to hurt Winston, **THOUGH HE HURT ME DAMNABLY!** He wrecked the War **AND ME!**

Secret. The real culprit is Balfour, who has escaped all obloquy! He it was by his dialectical subtleties who persuaded the War Council (I being the only dissentient) to plump for the Dardanelles!

Yours till Hell freezes,

Fisher

...

556: TO SIR ERNEST HODDER-WILLIAMS

Dungavel

September 27th, 1919

Dear Sir Ernest,

... I can't share your opinion as to the Book being good! It's not me! IT'S A CORPSE! I can't shake my fist in your face in print, and 'you be d—d' is quite a different thing when written and when said! The Bishop of Winchester¹ is horrified at my *Times* articles and letters, but he wasn't when I 'd—d' his eyes to his face a few weeks ago! However, I've been pushed on the precipice as to this book, and it's no use being reluctant any more! Anyhow, you've done YOUR best to appease my disgust!

Yours,

Fisher

...

557: TO ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET EARL BEATTY

Dungavel

October 13th, 1919

Dear Beatty,

Just a line (*and wanting no reply*) on your being First Sea Lord, as I this moment see announced in *The Times*.

It is a momentous time, when the whole aspect of sea war is so utterly changed by the prodigious and daily development of aircraft. I was unexpectedly swept off my legs to write a book and forgot for the moment what I'd said. I am staying up here for many months to keep clear of the results, or I would have endeavoured to have

¹ The Rt. Rev. Edward S. Talbot, Bishop of Winchester, 1911-1923.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

invited you and Lady Beatty to lunch with me at 19 St. James's Square, which are my headquarters till I die. (I expect land war will also be greatly affected.) It's a great blessing you have youth on your side and such general enthusiasm to back you up!

Yours,

Fisher

558: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on October 18th, 1919]

Sir,

It's ludicrous waste to keep all these Government dockyards in being as if the German Fleet was still in being. Let them be hired for mercantile use. If no one will take them — *Shut them up at once.* I can't conceive what this big cruising fleet is wanted for! *Pay it off! We are still going on spending two millions sterling daily more than our daily income!* A General Election would 'sack the lot'!

There is no other remedy, Sir. None! How the Army and War Office and other huge departmental Estimates yet exist is beyond me. It's financial disaster! The education alone now here is four shillings in the pound! The Labour Party were fools not to force an election instead of Russia!

Yours,

Fisher

559: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[October 19th, 1919]

[published on October 21st, 1919]

Sir,

My letter yesterday (Saturday) too weak!

The education levy at Arasaig [Scottish village] is seven shillings two pence three farthings in the pound. In 1916 it was only one shilling one penny and one farthing! (They have now mutinied and won't pay! Quite right! Mutiny is the only thing now!)

The local newspaper also tells us that Rosyth Dockyard is to be the headquarters of the Atlantic Fleet (I enclose the newspapers)!

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

How that German Fleet (even at the bottom of the sea) still frightens our highest sea officers! (I *do* hope Jellicoe won't go frightening the Antipodes!)¹

Sir! We are a peculiar people! (Deuteronomy, chap. xii, v. 2.) We are the Lost Ten Tribes! No other explanation for our always muddling through! Surely, if there is to be an Atlantic Fleet it ought to be on the Atlantic! Sir Geoffrey Hornby (undoubtedly the greatest admiral since Nelson) worshipped Blacksod Bay, on the west coast of Ireland. He took me with him when he took a great fleet there. It is one of the finest harbours in the world and the nearest land to America.

I am going to ask Schwab, of the Bethlehem Steel Works, who built for England a swarm of submarines in five months and sent them unconvoyed to the Dardanelles, when no one else had ever even built a single one under 14 months, and they always wanted convoys — I am going to ask him to run a line of huge passenger steamers (100,000 tons!) from a harbour outside New York to Blacksod Bay, of a new type *going 40 miles an hour* (bigness don't signify, to Blacksod Bay!). Then from there he will make a bit of railway to Achill. Good railway exists from Achill to Larne. Thirty miles Channel Tube, Larne to Stranraer.² Stranraer to Dover. Dover Channel Tube to Calais. Calais to Constantinople direct. Channel Tube under Bosphorus. Then Baghdad Railway direct to Calcutta, and Burma and China (to Peking!) and Japan (Japanese Tube already projected!) *There you are!* The Americans will do it! We are bankrupt — if not in money, yet in enterprise!

Schwab will do it.

'He'll get the ships, he'll get the tubes,
And he'll get the money too!'

Yours,

Fisher

N.B. — Facility of communication begets '*community of interests*', which is the only treaty that is not a '*scrap of paper*'! But that is not all! Can you imagine civil war between Middlesex and Hertfordshire, or the State of New Jersey fighting the State of Pennsylvania?

¹ Jellicoe was visiting Australia and New Zealand, at the invitation of the Dominion Governments, to advise them on naval defence problems.

² Blacksod Bay is an inlet of the Atlantic in north-west County Mayo, Ireland; Achill Island is just south of Blacksod Bay; Larne is on the north-east coast of Ireland, above Belfast; and Stranraer is at the south-west tip of Scotland, across the North Channel from Larne.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

560: TO ALBANY F. PETCH

Dungavel

October 24th, 1919

Dear Petch,

Enclosed is from Sir Thomas Troubridge, Bart.¹ I've never met him and know nothing of him. He may be honest or he may be a rogue, I don't know. I knew his brother, an Admiral. If Schwab puts his extra money into this job, he'll be as great a man as Napoleon, as it will fix up the Irish question and make America and England into one. Schwab is the man to do it. . . .

Yours,

Fisher

I sent you an express letter for Schwab.² Cable him to hustle. . . . I expect I'll have to join Schwab as his *pusher*. Ask him. I don't want any money, as I'm a pauper!

561: FROM JAMES MASTERTON-SMITH³

War Office

October 30th, 1919

Private

My dear Lord Fisher,

. . . last Sunday I read the book through at a sitting. I could hear you talking in every line, and it is good to know that your natural force is not abated one jot or tittle.

. . . Looking back on it all, as I so often do, I am more and more saddened by what happened in that fateful month of May. The 15th of May, 1915, was the best day the Germans had in the War. The breach between yourself and Winston was the tragedy — in my

¹ Troubridge's letter of October 21st thanked Fisher for his *Times* letter of that day, endorsed his reference to Blacksod Bay, and solicited his help. 'I have been trying to make a harbour there, or rather to give facilities for the splendid existing natural harbour there, for nearly 14 years, but without success, though I have Parliamentary powers to do all that is necessary and build the connecting railway.'

² The letter to Schwab, enclosed, read: 'Kindly take on enclosed! It will pay you bigger dividends than the Bethlehem Steel Works, and *crown your life!* Because it will make for peace.'

³ Masterton-Smith was Assistant Secretary (Additional) of the War Office and Air Ministry, 1919-1920.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

judgment the outstanding tragedy — of the War. Together you were invincible and would have gone from triumph to triumph. But the high gods willed otherwise, and from the first foredoomed the Dardanelles to failure. Nothing went right with it, and with it fell the only combination (i.e. yourself and Winston) that could have finished the War with as complete a victory in a third of the time and a fiftieth of the cost, in blood as well as treasure.

Memories is an entertaining book. Nothing you wrote or said could be anything else, and on nearly every page there is a nugget of pure gold picked out of the mine of Truth. But it isn't *the* book that I am waiting for from you. That must come — and come soon — unfolding with all the authentic documents (your minutes, Mediterranean lectures, *Naval Necessities* volumes,¹ and letters) the continuous story of your successive administrations, afloat and ashore, which led up to the War being won before it began! . . .

No one in history was ever kicked on to a pedestal of fame like Sturdee. If he had been allowed to pack all the shirts he wanted to take, and if Egerton² had not been given that peremptory order, Sturdee would have been looking for von Spee still! . . .

Yours very sincerely,

J. Masterton-Smith

562: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on October 31st 1919]

Sir,

It is said of the Jews that 'their eyes are blinded to this day' to what is, to us Christians, so transparent and sure a truth. That can be said of the politicians, Parliament, and the public.

It's as clear as daylight that future war at sea absolutely precludes the use of any vessel of war that can't go under water, because aircraft will compel it. So why keep any of the present lot? Not only that, but you've got also to scrap all the admirals and superior officers because they won't do for the new job! Put them all in some museum — like Greenwich Hospital (keep the submarines and Co.).

¹ *Naval Necessities*, three privately printed volumes containing papers written or collected by Fisher as Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth and as First Sea Lord, bearing on the reforms, 1904-1906.

² Admiral Sir George Egerton, Commander-in-Chief at Plymouth, 1913-1916.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

All you want is the present naval side of the Air Force! — that's the future Navy — only costing a few millions!

But what is one to say of the Army Estimates being over four hundred millions sterling one year after the most devastating Armistice the world ever heard of? (Are we at war? Who with?) The Navy Estimates the year we built the *Dreadnought* and had war in sight with Germany for certain were only [35] millions sterling!

Four hundred and five millions *now* for the Army — 35 millions *then* for the Navy! What a contrast! Is the whole nation blinded, like the Jews?

And yet 'the Articles of War', which were read by the captain in old days (when I first came to sea) every Sabbath Day in the Navy, had this preamble in the Act of Parliament:

'It is upon the Navy whereon, under the good Providence of God, the wealth, peace, and safety of this kingdom doth chiefly depend', (or words to that effect).

Yours,

Fisher

563: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on November 3rd, 1919]

Sir,

One advantage of being a lord is that one gets Hansard. Dr. Macnamara therein states that on the outbreak of war 58,000 odd civilians were employed by the Admiralty at the Admiralty establishments, and now one whole year after the most devastating Armistice known to man, and the German Fleet through imbecility at the bottom of the sea, there are 96,000 odd still employed! Do you wonder, Sir, if on a secluded road in Scotland some unknown man waves his whip and roars out to me, 'Sack the lot, Sir!'

Yours,

Fisher

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

564: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on November 6th, 1919]

Sir,

By land and sea the approaching prodigious aircraft development knocks out the present Fleet, makes invasion practicable, cancels our country being an island, and transforms the atmosphere into the battle-ground of the future.

I say to the Prime Minister there is only one thing to do to the ostriches who are spending these vast millions ('which no man can number') on what is as useful for the next war as bows and arrows! — 'Sack the Lot.'

Yours,

Fisher

Postscript — As the locusts swarmed over Egypt, so will the aircraft swarm in the heavens, carrying (some of them) inconceivable cargoes of men and bombs, some fast, some slow. Some will act like battle cruisers, others as destroyers. All cheap and (this is the gist of it) requiring only a few men as the crew.

No one's imagination can as yet depict it all. If I essayed it now I should be called a lunatic. I gently forecast it in January 1915, and more vividly on July 11, 1918. We have the star guiding us, if only we will follow it.

'Time and the Ocean and some fostering star
In high cabal have made us what we are'

On Friday last the presiding genius of the 'Marine Engineers' said, 'The day of oil fuel and the oil engine had arrived.' In 1885 I was called an 'oil maniac'. — *Nunc Dimittis*.

565: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on November 10th, 1919]
'Marr'd'

Sir,

Do you hear the bleating of these sheep in your ears? We are going to hew Agag into pieces! (I refer to the moaning of the Admirals and to the keeping the best of the ships — exactly the same spirit as Saul.)

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

There was the same bleating of the sheep and the same preservation of Agag when masts and sails were doomed and the engineer came into his own! Saul got kicked out for not 'sacking the lot'.

The reason I put the word 'marr'd' at the head of this letter is that when, six months before the war, a Cabinet Minister of that period read my printed memorandum that German submarines would sink defenceless merchant ships with their women and children, he observed that I had 'marr'd' my memorandum by that prophecy! Don't let us have another 'marr'd' prophecy.

The air controls the war. Unless all warships can get under the water they will be blown out of the water. Millions upon millions of money are still being wantonly wasted in the upkeep of ships that can't be used in war. When this winter the price of food and coal goes up, the masses will 'sack the lot'. A gust of fury will clear out this effete Parliament.

Yours,

Fisher

566: TO AUSTIN HARRISON¹

c/o M. Hare
Eton College, Windsor
[early December 1919]

Sir,

I am with a boy at the point of death² to whom I'm guardian and more than a father, so I can only send a short note to say:

What possible effect can be produced on a Government which puts forth Navy Estimates of £157,528,000 yesterday? *More than three times that of 1914-1915!!!* See what I've written about this to *The Times*. What effect? *NIL!!* The Prime Minister is helpless. He cheered 'sack the lot', sent me his love, and is the slave of the Tories.

Yours,

Fisher

The only remedy is revolution and a Cromwell! Court, social, and Tory influence all profit. PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL AND SECRET, AS THE PRIME MINISTER'S MESSAGE WAS SECRET.

¹ Harrison, Editor of the *English Review*, 1910-1923.

² The present (fourteenth) Duke of Hamilton. The Hamilton children adored their 'Uncle Jacky'.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920
567: TO SIR JULIAN CORBETT

White Hart Hotel
Windsor
December 3rd, 1919

My dear Corbett,

. . . But I must write and let you know how kind I think it of you (*which was the object of my seeing you*) as to your telling Mr. Child your Baltic paper might be inserted, which I fear I had spoilt by interpolations! (But possibly you put that right.) If I had been in London, I don't think I would have put it in the book for fear of embarrassing you, as one never knows how far it may inconvenience people putting in their names. *So kindly forgive me if this is the case!* It's a wonderfully valuable paper, only surpassed by your immortal article in the *XIXth Century* that Admiral Mahan wrote of in such admiration and Sir J. Knowles wouldn't allow to be reproduced! . . .

Yours,

Fisher

568: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on December 12th, 1919]

Sir,

Somewhere about 600 years before the Christian Era, Baruch (a friend of Jeremiah) made this caustic remark:

'Give not the things that are profitable unto thee to a strange nation.'

So, though daily receiving 'pin-pricks' — 'Why don't I describe in detail the future Air Navy and the future Submersible Navy?' — I refrain for Baruch's reason — but really almost any fool could make the plans — they are so idiotically simple! This is the beauty of the future war. No mountains, rivers, protected harbours, no snow-bound Alpine passes are in the business — you just fly above all these things and drop your multiple ton bomb! Selah!

But isn't it funny?:

Just when the air is clearly the predominant partner — Seely¹ is sacked! — and the '400-million-a-year' War Office and the '158-

¹ Major-General John E. B. Seely (afterwards first Baron Mottistone), Under-Secretary of State for Air, January-November 1919.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

million-a-year' Admiralty, instead of being subservient and squashed, trample on Seely and Co.

Yours,

Fisher

There will be types in the air, as there were types on the water — the destroyers swifter than eagles (175 miles an hour guaranteed), the equivalent battle-cruiser with peculiar armour (but that's another story), and the lethargic bomb-carriers.

As usual, the experts will say I am mad.

N.B. The Royal Society said the man was mad who predicted aeroplanes.

569: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on December 15th, 1919]

Sir,

Hansard, December 11, 1919, column 1,121: Some three-quarters of a million sterling (£739,000, half her total cost!) being spent emasculating the fastest battle cruiser in the world with the lightest draught of water and an equal sum apportioned for similarly humbugging the *Renown*, her sister ship! Why? *The Faddists want more armour!* The Congenital Idiots can't see that speed is armour! The fast battle cruiser *Invincible* sent Admiral von Spee to perdition (where he belongs) without having a single man on board the *Invincible* killed or wounded! Why? Because she had superior speed and the bigger gun! Give Peace in our Time, O Lord! (Unless you sack the lot!) You know the French story! They operated successfully but they killed the patient! — and the surgeons said, 'Mort — guéri!'

Yours,

Fisher

N.B. A prolongation of the *Renown* (so admired and being copied in America) is going to be only one night at sea from America to Europe! All my arguments failed till I hit on a poster:

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

'COME OVER FOR THE WEEK-END!'

Now it's fixed up!

What is a poster? It's reiteration! Reiteration is the secret of conviction! Repetition is the soul of journalism! Advertisement is both! It's the soul of business!

Keep on saying '*Sack the lot!*' and we shall be rid of them!

570: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on December 22nd, 1919]

Sir,

About 5 p.m. on March 7, 1917, I unexpectedly heard the most touching — the most moving — appeal of my life, when William Redmond in the House of Commons pleaded for the Freedom of Ireland, and stretching forth both his hands, in eloquent words besought in God's name for oblivion of the past by the warring factions of his own country, stating he never met a single Englishman who would not grant all that Ireland wished! *Nothing came of it.* He met his death not liberating his own country but another. He was lovingly and reverently carried from the battlefield by Ulster soldiers on an Ulster ambulance (it's only the politicians who cannot be feudless). 'He being dead, yet speaketh.' Can't these politicians now grant his prayer?

Yours,

Fisher

We have wrecked Ireland as we wrecked the Russian Revolution. In both cases we had our opportunity and lost it. Fourteen times 'Too late' Mr. Lloyd George memorably said! Mr. Punch wittily says we lost everything except the war. I can't now quite make up my mind which did win the war — the blockade or the Bolsheviks? The one outside the Germans, the other inside.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

571: TO SIR W. ROBERTSON NICOLL

Ferne House
December 26th, 1919

My beloved Friend,

We've just arrived at the above address, bringing the Duchess's eldest son here in an ambulance, and he is prospering. I think I told you he had been at the Gate of Death from neglected appendicitis at Eton. We are going to take him to Monte Carlo on February 15. (*We do so look forward to your being there!* I hope to get a villa about March 8, and could give you a room, I think, with great delight, but I will tell you about that later on).

But the object of this letter is to thank you for the *British Weekly* I have only just had time to open! (Observe, I've taken it in for years!) The article is a work of art! and casts a halo round *Records*!

I'm thinking of bursting out on Nelson. No one has adequately depicted his tenderness — he was three parts a woman! He never flogged a man. (My first Captain flogged every man in the ship! Savages then ruled us!) But Nelson has never been portrayed — dying a pauper because instead of chasing dollars he always chased the enemy! His one care — *the health of his sailors!* getting onions and oranges to prevent scurvy amongst them! and so on and so on! . . .

Yours,

Fisher

572: TO THE DUCHESS OF HAMILTON

[1920?]

How wonderfully excellent is Shakespeare about death!

'The best of rest is sleep,
And that thou oft provok'st; yet grossly fear'st
Thy death, which is no more.'

(*Measure for Measure.*)

And also saith the poet:

'To die is landing on some silent shore
Where billows never break nor tempests roar.'

'Death is the only evil that can never touch us.'

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

'When we are, death is not,
When death comes, we are not.'

Is not this good by Cicero?

'Death (he said) is an event either utterly to be disregarded if it extinguishes the soul's existence, or much to be wished if it convey the soul to some region where it will exist for ever. One of these two consequences must necessarily follow the disunion of soul and body. There is no other possible alternative. What, then, have I to fear, if, after death, I shall either not be miserable or shall certainly be happy?'

I so appreciate this by Lecky:

'Remember, above all, that whatever may lie beyond the tomb, the tomb itself is nothing to you. The narrow prison house, the gloomy pomp, the hideousness of decay, are known to the living *and the living alone*. By a too common illusion of the imagination, men picture themselves as *consciously* dead — going through the process of corruption and aware of it . . . Endeavour earnestly to erase this illusion from your mind, for it lies at the root of the fear of death. Nothing is less real than the grave. We should no more be concerned with the after-fate of our discarded bodies than with that of the hair which the hair-cutter has cut off. The sooner they are resolved into their primitive elements the better. The imagination should never be suffered to dwell upon their decay.'

I think the above is quite splendid, and a most excellent bit of dictation for all children to repeatedly copy out year by year as they grow in years.

573: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on January 5th, 1920]

Sir,

A friend tells me in Canada a policeman can ask any saunterer, even in a glossy silk hat and white spats, if he is idle, and can hale him there and then before authority to be made to work. My friend may be lying, but it's a righteous lie. Elisha lied to the hosts of the

Syrians and said: 'This is not the way, neither is this the city — follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek' (being himself!). By the way, I've never read any episcopal or ecclesiastical remonstrance about Elisha's lie — I suppose it's the origin of 'All is fair in love and war'!

To resume: The only escape from national ruin is by *increased production*, and to this end the object of these few words is not to saddle the 'working man' alone with this vital necessity, but to lay that vital necessity on the whole nation. A huge co-operation of all classes is imperative. '*Co-operation in profits*' being the first article in the new Magna Charta. Some have brains, some have money, some have physical aptitude. All lend a hand. This is the only way to get rid of class antagonism, nationalization, and all the other funny systems of getting something out of nothing, or 'eating your cake and drinking it' (as someone said I said — another Elisha lie!).

According to recently disclosed departmental facts (I own also these may be lies) the United States dollar is scooping us out, and the United States mercantile marine (at zero before the war) possesses now 12 million tons of shipping, as against our corresponding 18 millions — not that I think England will succumb — *she never does* — but '*Production*' is the one word. The artisan must be encouraged and be made free by becoming a partner. That's the way out. To be a *flâneur* in Bond-street does us no good in production. Such must 'pay up' for that luxury or go to prison (as in Canada). *Everyone must work.*

Yours,

Fisher

Soon it may be once more 'too late'. Read Ludendorff's epilogue that 'Workmen's Councils' brought about the Revolution and the Revolution stopped the war.¹ I don't agree. That same bevy who won the war for Elisha (when he lied) won the war for us. We prayed — the others didn't! Kitchener said to Lord Roberts at the Marne, 'Someone has been praying!' There was no other way of accounting for the miracle!

¹ Erich Ludendorff, Quartermaster-General of the German Army, 1914-1918, had published *Meine Kriegserinnerungen* in 1919. An English translation, *My War Memories*, had appeared in the same year.

[published on January 8th, 1920]

Sir,

Justly described as the most distinguished of living poets, he writes me that Thor's Hammer is urgently required to beat into the British mind that Aviation spells Salvation. Even Macaulay's Schoolboy knows that it's not war aviation that's at stake! Civil aircraft are capable of the war job. They are depicted leaving their peaceful avocations (I take this from a war lecture) and arriving in their thousands of thousands (darkening the heavens in their flight), and without a declaration of war appearing unexpectedly over London and pouring down cascades of lethal gas (the humane describer adds there is a good deal to be said for a gas which kills without torturing).

Terror is no argument, least of all in our nation. When our blood is up we are equal to any fate. Nevertheless, the Germans are going ahead of us in aviation-structure and aviation-engines. Intellect, imagination, push, money — all are pleading — yet the Air Service, under a Sub-Secretary, is relegated to the War Office — bad enough if it had been relegated to the Admiralty, for, after all, that good Admiral was right (all Admirals ain't good) who told Mr. Pitt that the business of the Admiralty was to prevent oversea invasion, and that it wasn't a military business. We must appeal unto Caesar (Caesar has had a good look in at the Spen Valley). Over four hundred millions sterling for probably more conscription if we were going to take on Russia, and a hundred and fifty millions for the Admiralty to buy 'bows and arrows' when a fraction of all this wanton waste spent in aviation would keep us in the forefront of the world, both in commerce and in war. All this is what no fellow can understand! Caesar shortly will Sack the Lot!

Yours,

Fisher

I've quoted from a lecture on the next war. Every fool knows that every war begins where the last war left off. Every airman knows that when the last war left off such a bombing had been arranged for Berlin (and was kept from starting) that would have made that city dust and ashes. Some people say the German nation at large still believe it wasn't beaten. There is a good deal to be said for this atmosphere that pervades Germany. Yet one does admire Foch,

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

even if he saved but one widow. It is computed that by agreeing to the Armistice when he did Foch saved two hundred thousand Allied casualties alone. The Germans would have been mown down (or bombed) in masses.

575: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on January 10th, 1920]

Sir,

I have boiled down Tirpitz, Ludendorff, and the other Germans into Bovril. The two that hurt us the most were Tirpitz and Ludendorff. Tirpitz destroyed over seven million tons of our shipping. Ludendorff on the deplorable March 21 [1918] captured about twice as many British soldiers as the whole British Army that first landed in France (86,000 was the exact number of British soldiers that were first landed). We asked our soldiers to put their backs to the wall. They did. We asked all our countrymen for self-denial and confidence. They gave it. *But it was a near thing!* Do we yet realize what we escaped? For some peculiar reason I cannot fathom, the German atrocities on women have been camouflaged. Lectures are being given about the next war. One recently at the United Service Institution by the Director of Trench Warfare and Gas Production. The question I ask is has the Peace as constituted welded together 80 million Germans instead of there being divers German Republics? If so, what chance have the 40 millions French? Apparently there's a Treaty that we are to fight for the French. If I was a Frenchman I would take no risks! The Rhine from start to finish — and no German Fleet to land a German Army on the Cotentin Peninsula!

Yours,

Fisher

576: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on January 12th, 1920]

Sir,

Newton saw an apple fall and deduced Gravitation. You and I might have seen millions of apples fall and only deduced pig-feeding.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

It's the same story about Bolshevism. We want some Newtonian Cromwell to enunciate that Bolshevism is the reaction from repressed Freedom. Armenian and Georgian Republics are going to be suppressed and thus Bolshevism propagated by perpetuating Turkish misrule in Asia. England herself is not free, so Bolshevism rears its head. A threat to dissolve Parliament makes its recalcitrant members feed out of the Prime Minister's hand. Did not some hundreds of them send a telegram to Paris? They can't save Armenia and Georgia if they wanted to. They don't represent the masses of this nation. It's the baldest, richest, effetest House of Commons we ever had. Look at the untrammelled, unparalleled wanton waste everywhere in every department. And business men fettered by unbusiness fools. Innumerable tons of shipping now in our harbours waiting to be unloaded. Who loaded them?

Yours,

Fisher

577: TO ADMIRAL JOHN MORESBY

Ferne House
January 15th, 1920

Beloved old Friend,

We are sad to hear of your bodily ailments, but your brain is wondrous clear and your pen as eloquent as ever! I fear we can't be of use to you, but do tell me if you want anything? This book has brought me much money, and I'VE NO USE FOR IT (as I've never had money) and you might as well have it (*or, rather, better than anyone else!*).

I'm off to Monte Carlo on February 14th to join Sir Frederick Treves, and taking the Duchess and her eldest son, who has been very ill but now convalescent.

Now pray do tell me if there is anything you want! Shall I send you a good nurse? (If I can get one.) I'LL PAY! Don't bother to write. *Send a telegram 'yes'.*

Yours,

Fisher



CROSSING CHANNEL EN ROUTE TO MONTE CARLO, AND AT MONTE CARLO,
FEBRUARY, 1920

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

578: TO SIR WILLIAM WATSON

[Ferne House]

January 16th, 1920

My dear Sir William,

I am greatly pained at your being insulted on my behalf by vituperative postcards. I'm used to it — I pray you are not — violence and strife seem my atmosphere! A man of God once blessed me as I passed along. I said: 'My lord Bishop, you, a man of peace, bless me!' 'Yes,' he said, 'fight and strife give the Peace of God!' And so it is when you come to look into Cruden's *Concordance* — 'MY peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth . . . In the world ye shall have tribulation . . . I came not to send peace, but a sword' (*Matthew*, 10: 34).¹ So there you are — any fool can see there ain't peace on earth or it would be Heaven! I once heard a sermon of 7 minutes that gave thanks for only the very few glimpses of Heaven given us! Otherwise, said the sapient preacher, we should think of nothing else and neglect our work here! But I didn't begin this letter to give you a sermon, but only my deep regret at your being molested on my account. The great remedy is the impenetrable armour of contempt and fortitude! Never stone these yelping curs! They only yelp the more! They hate being unnoticed!

The 'Beneficent One' is expecting you to leave Windermere at 11.25 a.m. on Monday, February 2, and arrive at Euston at 6.35 p.m., where a motor car will meet you from 'Rickard's'. *Ask him if he is Rickard's chauffeur come for the Duchess of Hamilton.* You drive to 19, St. James's Square, where all is arranged. The next day the motor car will be at the door at 10 a.m., and you drive to Waterloo station, where you will find a first-class compartment reserved for you to *Tisbury*. You have to go early, as they are not allowed to reserve, but the 'Beneficent One' overcomes all reserve, and so they always obey her gracious telephone! The motor car will meet you at *Tisbury* and you will get here for lunch and a *very, very* warm welcome. Take my word for it, you'll find it like home, and won't want to leave when the time comes! (I've often started, but come back!)

We begin our pilgrimage to the sun on February 14. By that time we shall have seen you settled down. Her Majesty has arranged your rooms. I thought I could have done better — wait and see! You'll be able to change, as other rooms empty.

Yours till the Angels smile on us,

Fisher

...

¹ The first two excerpts are, respectively, from *John* xiv, 27 and xvi, 33.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

579: TO SIR WILLIAM WATSON

January 18th, 1920

My dear Sir William,

I do indeed love you sending me your battered '*Ode on King Edward's Coronation*'! ('The harp his sole remaining joy.') You send me your own and last copy! Also the inscription links me with a great past (*and that is nice of you!*). When I pass Dryden's bust in Westminster Abbey, I never fail to thank him for

'Not Heaven itself upon the past has power,
What has been has been, and I have had my hour.'

And in this ode of yours such eternal words:

'Time and the Ocean and some fostering Star
In high cabal have made us what we are!'

Till your book coming to me, I always said 'guiding', not 'fostering' (*thinking of the Magi!*). Don't you think it's lovely — the WORDING of the description?

'And lo! the Star which they saw in the *East* went before them
till it came and *stood over* where the young child was!'

(N.B. The further '*west*' we go in civilization, the more convinced we become that the wise men come from the '*East*'.) But I see your word 'fostering' is more apposite and appropriate. It is sad that this ode of yours (through King Edward's sudden illness and postponement of his coronation) lost its commencing big sale and deserved notoriety. Such is life. I am quite sure my favourite words are those of Jeremiah. (I hear a new Life written of [him] that does him credit! *but what a time to wait!!!*) He says, '[And] Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them [*them*] not!' (I think Chapter 35 [45], verse 5.) They come if unsought! Dean Inge¹ is lovely on those early mystics who flourished about A.D. 1300. 'Spendthrifts in their emotions'! While the miser therein — self-repressing, resisting, thinking these holy feelings lures of the Devil, loses his own soul! So I always preach the word

'REGARDLESS'

Give rein to all your impulses! If the world is shocked, tell it to go to the Devil, as you won't! While I am on these mystics, I think their cardinal vices were sweet! (Why are they called the cardinal points

¹ The Very Rev. William R. Inge, Dean of St. Paul's, 1911-1934.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

of the compass? Why CARDINAL? I don't know!) The mystics' cardinal vices were four:

1. Low Aims.
2. Despondency.
3. Moral Cowardice.
4. Intellectual Arrogance.

In some ancient fable I discovered in a worm-eaten book (it says) Satan was allowed when kicked out of Heaven to take one and only one weapon for the ruin of mankind. He chose despondency!

If I wasn't writing at 3 a.m., I would not have inflicted this drivel on you — so no more, but pray never be despondent or you play up to the Devil!

Yours,

Fisher

N.B. I warn you again, once you all get here, you won't want to leave!

P.S. Did you ever read and realize the collect for Nelson's birthday?¹ You'll hear the sound of Angels' wings!

Postscript. The Duchess (as usual) read my letter to you and went one better as to your remaining on in London when passing through en route here. . . . Alas! *H.M.S. Pinafore* will be over, so you won't be able to see that gem! 'He polished up the handle of the great front door. . . . He polished up the handle so carefuller, that he soon became the Ruler of the Queen's Naveel!' WHAT A TRUE EXPOSÉ OF THE SUCCESSFUL MAN! Only it's the 'BACK-DOOR' handle is *quicker*! A recent peer a wonderful exemplification!

Second Postscript. In reading what follows it occurs to me to quote what the 'Beneficent One' praised recently in one of my Sunday sacerdotal expositions to her 'quiver-ful' (observing the Jewish quiver held seven and not five, as erroneously reported by some of the Ancient Fathers)!

Lord Fisher loquitur:

'Mind, I don't say these things — I am not a saint, I am only an echo; I am the sounding-board on the pulpit to make the voice go further. I am the sign-post, dictating you the road to Heaven. The sign-post don't go there.'

SELAH!

¹ The Collect for September 29th, which reads: 'O Everlasting God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order; Mercifully grant, that as thy holy Angels alway do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

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580: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Ferne House
January 26th, 1920

Dearest Cis,

Many thanks to you and dear Jane for your birthday letters. I've been overwhelmed with telegrams and letters. It's awful!!! for Bertrand Dawson puts me down for *110* years! (You say 100, *but I know better!*) . . .

I've been hoping to find a flat and furnish it for myself. Alas! I lost a big chance in St. James's Square (ONE HAS TO BE QUICK!). Now I'm hoping to get one near the McKennas in Smith Square. It's so near the House of Lords (*which is better than any Club!*). The Hamiltons are most kind to me, but at the same time I like to have a place I can flee to at an instant's notice, and also it is not always convenient to go to the Hamilton flat in St. James's Square, and, further (*as a return for all their kindness to me*), I want to give them an overflow flat at any hour they may wish, as often they have not room at their flat in St. James's Square. *And, anyhow, I could always well let it!* . . .

Your loving father,

F.

581: TO H. F. LAWES¹

Ferne House
January 29th, 1920

Dear Mr. Lawes,

You will find by the enclosed (which kindly return in registered envelope herewith) that I have anticipated your desire as regards Nelson, or rather I've been pushed into it by a lot of people like yourself with a mistaken perspective of my attributes!² I'm essentially a fraud! (*camouflage in excelsis!*) and the more I tell people this, the less they believe it! The end of it is I shall be immortally quired!

¹ Lawes, a perfect stranger to the Admiral, had written him on January 18th, urging that he write a life of Nelson.

² Towards the end of January Fisher had begun to draft the first chapters of a projected third volume, *Visions*. The material reproduced in the Appendix is as far as he got. Part I was to consist of new material; II, of his articles and letters in *The Times*; III, of a long essay on Nelson.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

If you don't mind, I've put your poem into *Visions* as a glaring example of how I've taken people in!¹ Asa comes to my mind how after 39 years he had a great relapse from his faith and turned to his physicians instead of to his God! (Such happens to the praised!)

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. I greatly value your letter, but shudder at your praise. I'm not used to it!

582: TO WALTER F. ROCH

Ferne House
February 1st, 1920

Private and Confidential — Secret

My dear Roch,

I send you an instant line after but a cursory glance at your book (which I have only just been able to get) to thank you for page 33 exceedingly!²

When the secrets of all hearts are revealed, there will be great readjustments! I always console myself with the 56th Verse of the 51st chapter of *Jeremiah*: '*The Lord God of Recompenses shall surely requite.*'

I walked away with Asquith (by his desire) after a celebrated lunch *au secret* (Kitchener, Haig, myself, and two others I must not specify). Why I was asked I don't know (nor why Asquith chose me as his confidant). I've never given him away and won't! any more than I've given Winston away or the traitorous Balfour (who, being the sworn ally of Asquith, betrayed him to Lloyd George and became Foreign Secretary for his 30 pieces of silver).

Balfour also (and *not* Winston) was the real author of the Dardanelles Adventure. It was Balfour's speech to the War Council (a marvel of subtle dialectics) that left me in a minority of one! You've let Balfour off (and *many others, too!*). No doubt your judgment is wise.

¹ Lawes's 28-line poem, enclosed in his letter, was entitled 'Age or Youth?', a eulogy of the Admiral's literary style.

² 'In 1918 bouquets, which no one grudges them, were freely given to other men who "won the war". But History, remembering his work, his foresight and his genius, will one day place even choicer flowers at Lord Fisher's feet, and may spare one or two for Mr. McKenna, recalling the fight he fought and the place he risked in the Cabinet of 1909' (Roch: *Mr. Lloyd George and the War* [London, 1920]).

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

Your self-restraint in not exposing some of the Dardanelles evidence is supremely wonderful. You, Andrew Fisher, and Mackenzie were the only patriots on that Dardanelles Commission.

I'm being pressed by a multitude to write a third Volume (founded on facts I have in documents) and to be called *Visions*. If I do, then these 'stuffed-with-sawdust' reputations now in expansion will become deflated wind-bags! The text will be from St. Paul — 'One star differeth from another star in glory'.

I do hope you'll re-enter Parliament. Soon a General Election, the Labour Party will sweep the floor, and we shall have history repeated. There will be a great split. The Tory Labour Party under Snowden — as usual, the Tories will be the 'stupid party'!

Yours till Hell freezes,

Fisher

Postscript. The best thing I ever wrote was in the *London Magazine* for last month (herewith).¹ Can you explain this riddle? Not one newspaper or journalist or reviewer has taken the very slightest notice of it, and yet *Memories* (which is 'drivel' in comparison) has been not only immensely and almost unprecedentedly reviewed! but 30,000 copies of it, and *Records*, were sold out at once! I enclose a chance specimen of a review of it I happen to have at my elbow. By the way, I note 'Hell freezes' is rebuked, so I say

Yours till the Angels smile on us,

Fisher

Get back into Parliament at the approaching General Election and join the Radical Labour Party.

¹ The viewpoint is indicated by the title of the article, 'Down With the Standing Army! How Conscription Paralysed the Navy and Paved the Way to Ruin' (*The London Magazine*, January 1920). From the first paragraphs:

'If the working man could only once realize that sea-power is so cheap, that — as a friend of mine, Arnold White, said — he could keep a Ford car, then he would sack the military party and abolish the War Office within twenty-four hours.

'The War Office, as its name implies, makes war. The Admiralty is a peace office; the British Navy can compel peace. The German *Panther* left Agadir [in the Moroccan Crisis of 1911] when England only hinted to Germany that she would fight. We had no Army to fight with, only 160,000 soldiers, so there's no doubt about it that it was the British Navy that compelled peace then.'

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920
583: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on February 2nd, 1920]

Sir,

Quite nice people are quite shocked that the common herd (the unvoiced ones), who invariably control every General Election, have thrown in their lot with the Labour Party.

These are the reasons therefor of these common people:

(1) We are now governed by bureaucrats (remarkably similar to Russia before the war). They harass every trade and fuddle all they touch.

(2) Ireland in rebellion. . . . We alienate America and all our sister nations in not allowing Ireland to be as free as they are.

(3) The simple and so obvious plan of getting rid of industrial unrest by the working man sharing in the profits is carped at and denied.

(4) The only possible way of retrieving our financial position is to spend less, and here we are deliberately organizing an Army twice as big as before the war. The common people mean peace, and they intend to have it.

(5) Aviation is practically ignored, and we go fossilizing and bankrupting with weapons of war by sea and land as extinct as bows and arrows.

(6) Unpardonable, wanton waste. At this moment, in the second year after the Armistice, we are spending over four million sterling a day, and you can't walk a yard without stumbling over some rascally scandal. Close here are masses of empty huts which comfortably housed an army, cumbering the ground that ought to be producing food, while thousands are houseless.

Are you surprised at the universal determination to sack the lot?

We fought most — lost most — spent most — and got the least out of the war of any nation.

Yours,

Fisher

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584: TO SIR ERNEST HODDER-WILLIAMS

Ferne House
February 5th, 1920

Dear Sir Ernest,

... I am exceedingly obliged for your printing the Preamble [to 'Visions']. I want to ask a score of friends what they candidly think of my writing such a book. The score I write to will, I know, be candid. When I get their replies, I will come to an immediate decision. Lord Rosebery is emphatic that I should write the book. He says that people with peculiarities should always write books if they feel a call. My having a call entirely depends upon my having a fat and mindful female stenographer, under thirty, capable of driving a Rolls-Royce and apt in colloquial French, and of pleasing appearance, and healthy enough to work eighteen hours a day when required. No limit to the salary I will give her. If you come across such a gem, will you kindly send me a telegram, as I start for Monte Carlo and Rome at 11 a.m. on February 14th. ...

Finally, I want to emphasize that I am not pledged to write this book at all. Sometimes I am inclined and sometimes I am not. Rosebery says I'm a genius, but I ain't; he also calls me a monomaniac about Nelson.

Yours,

Fisher

585: TO ?

Ferne House
February 5th, 1920

Private and Confidential

Sir,

Yes! I am as regards the Labour Party 'Yours fraternally'. I've been a labourer all my days — John Burns, late M.P., always addressed me as 'Fellow-Labourer'.

Your Labour Party (this is a 'vision'!) will split into two. There will be a Tory 'door-mat' party and there will be a Progressive Radical Party (I am the latter) (Tories are always '*stupid*'). (Disraeli named them such!) My one fear is that this Progressive Labour Party (splendidly engineered as they are now) may defeat their own ends by scaring the people with Bolshevism! (I don't deride Bolshevism —

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

it won the War for us!))¹ Also I dread that the '*Nationalization*' business will eventuate into a worse bureaucracy than that which damns us now! My *Times* letter of February 2 in my opinion hits the bull's-eye every time in the six heads it divides itself into. I have a great opinion of the Labour leaders, but I don't as yet see a Cromwell! *We want an outstanding character to lead the Labour Party such as Cromwell.*

I want you clearly to understand that I don't care a d—n for anybody. Neither do I want anything for myself — I am free and unfettered!

'Sworn to no party — of no sect am I
I can't be silent — and I will not lie.'

I am poor and always have been, but like the prisoner in the Bastille I've got used to it! I have had my 'exceeding high mountains', but I have invariably declined to worship the Devil, and I ain't going to worship him now in withholding unpalatable words from the Labour or any other party.

Yours,

Fisher

586: TO SIR ERNEST HODDER-WILLIAMS

Hotel Metropole
Monte Carlo
February 26th, 1920

Dear Sir Ernest,

Since writing you, the Preamble has arrived, and two such opposite heroes as Sir Frederick Treves (a really great author) and Sir Basil Zaharoff, the richest man in the world (not excepting Rockefeller), each persuade it's going to be [the] crowning of my life, but having dictated the first bit of it to the Duchess, I've succumbed and consider it all balderdash and blather! However, Sir Frederick Treves argues with me that not being a conventional book

¹ Fisher may have had this fact in mind: a million German troops were kept in the East (mostly in the Ukraine), to enforce the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918), at a moment when they were badly needed in the West. Half a million might have turned the scale in the great German offensive of the spring of 1918. Then, too, with Brest-Litovsk began the infiltration of Communist propaganda into Germany, carried on through the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin and through infected German prisoners of war returning home. See Letter No. 570.

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and without a plan and so inconsequent makes it all the more attractive! and especially saleable (however, that part of it does not appeal to me!). Anyhow, I'll let it stand over a bit.

I'm lying fallow here. The Duchess returning on March 28, and I stay on with the young Marquis, who is recovering his strength as the eagle, and boxes and fences with excellent masters of the art, and plays the big fiddle, and talks French. (All this is my idea of a Gentleman's Education! and I am his Guardian!) His ancestor was Ambassador to Russia, and this will fit him to be the same! And his smile (derived from his Mother) wins every heart!

Yours,

Fisher

...

587: TO ADMIRAL JOHN MORESBY

Monte Carlo
February 26th, 1920

My beloved old Friend,

We have just received your sweet and treasured letter of February 20, as you are leaving for the nursing home, and we pray with all our hearts for your comfort there and safety and for your being yet kept with us as our minister of consolation and piety! [of] which this last letter of yours is a shining example, more particularly your argument with the High Church divine that we can't bribe God by giving £50,000 for a church or almshouses! (YOU HAD HIM THERE!)

We hope you will let someone send us your address of the nursing home, and the Duchess will surely visit you. She goes home on March 28th from here. I remain on longer, as Sir Frederick Treves and the local doctor strongly advise my having the sun's heat to cause my calamities to exude in perspiration, instead of the blight of the English east wind congesting all my interior economy!

The Duchess is so glad you've enjoyed the butter from her Jersey cows, and looks forward to your having more of it by and by! We shall most anxiously await news of you and hope you will send a telephone to Gerrard 1490 at 19, St. James's Square, and they will telephone us how you are getting on. . . .

Heaven guard and comfort you is our constant thought.

Yours,

Fisher

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588: TO SIR ALFRED YARROW

Monte Carlo

February 29th, 1920

My beloved old Friend,

. . . That wonderful apparatus you gave us is the comfort of our lives in making tea with safety and delight, instead of danger and burning our fingers! Every morning I bless you at 4 a.m. when I light it up! (I feel exactly like the muezzin on the minaret calling on Allah when I set fire!)

Why don't Miss Barnes bring you here? R.S.V.P.! It's Paradise!!! And fancy my not finding it till in my 80th year!!! If the Duchess dies (as is quite likely) — she troubles about so many things! — I shall live here altogether! So do come at once! Telegraph if I am to get you rooms, as the place NEVER known to be so crowded ever before! . . . All the world is here. It's perfection. If a leaf falls, it's immediately picked up. Sunshine, music, beauty, and gambling — what more can you desire? So come on! The Duchess sends you both her best love, and so do I.

Yours,

Fisher

589: TO SIR ERNEST HODDER-WILLIAMS

Monte Carlo

March 2nd, 1920

Dear Sir Ernest,

Just a line to say I've turned my back on Hulton and his blandishments.¹ *Private. I don't like the look of him!* Also I dislike the ways of the Roman Catholic Church! (How do I know you are not a Jesuit!!!) And I've just had chapter and verse of the intense propaganda of all his newspapers to magnify the Roman Catholic faith, which has ruined every country it has flourished in! Observe how all the Latin races are decaying! . . .

Yours,

Fisher

¹ Edward Hulton (afterwards first Baronet), 'enticed by the dreams of avarice' (Fisher), had offered to bring out the whole book (*Visions*) in his newspapers. He was the proprietor of the *Daily Sketch*, *Evening Standard*, etc.

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590: TO SIR ALFRED YARROW

Monte Carlo
March 12th, 1920

Dearly Beloved,

At the present moment, never having had it before, I am crippled with rheumatics, and we are leaving by the next train for the Ritz Hotel, Paris, to get out of this pestilential climate. At noon you are on the Equator. At sunset you are on the Arctic. So I got a severe chill, and I cannot say for certain whether I can accompany the Duchess to your meeting, so though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. May I leave it open a little longer till I see how I am? Also, Sir Frederick Treves, who is here, cautions me that for some months to come I must be very careful.

It certainly is an amazing spot, the palm trees of Engedi flourish abundantly of an immense size, and the hibiscus and the bougainvilliers [*sic*] (requiring the hot house in England) flourish here as a weed. The arbutus blossoms like the rose and 'brings forth its fruit in due season' like huge strawberries. The water comes out of a rock like Moses smote at Meribah, there are no taxes, no poor, and so clean that not even a leaf in the road that is not instantly picked up by a scavenger in a princely uniform. And associated with all this the scum of the earth at the gambling tables till 4 a.m.! 'Every prospect pleases, and only man is vile.' Heaven and Hell touch each other.

Yours,

Fisher

591: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on March 13th, 1920]

Sir,

This last portentous war, probably altering the whole face of the earth (and certainly establishing a new Community of Nations on a basis only conceivable by the Apostolic Socialists), was waged against a military tyranny that would have stamped out Freedom and established War as the only god to worship!

All nations spent their best blood, and only by God's Providence (and not by their own arm) did they win!

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When each country demands of another repayment in cash for what was spent in this common cause, it has all the aspect of the price of blood, and as if we were setting a valuation on those millions of young souls who sacrificed their lives for Freedom, not for Cash!

Can't all these international debts be wiped out?

England will lose most! Let her lead! And like that great similitude (written for our example) say to all ('moved with compassion') 'I forgive thee all thy debt'.

Yours,

Fisher

592: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on April 13th, 1920]

Sir,

I told you the absolute (and uncontradicted) truth in one of my letters: 'That we had fought more — lost more — spent more — and got the least — out of the war than any other nation!' I should have added (and I now supply the omission), 'We are taxed more!'

Why? Because the House of Commons encourages scandalously wasteful Estimates. What does everyone know and say? 'That this country must spend less and earn more'. But how can we when rascally waste is slurred over by an effete House of Commons?

Take the Navy Estimates — just one item — the mass of vessels we now maintain all over the world 'to show the Flag'. Was there ever so ludicrous a waste of money? We damned it years ago, but it now pops up again.

Sir, do you think these Navy Estimates would be what they are (a stupendous monument of waste) if I could send for each individual responsible for the figures and say to him: 'Now prove to me in detail (£10,000 at a time) how each item ministers to "the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and its instant readiness for war!" If you can't prove it I wipe it out'? (I am not preaching what I have not practised.) If the Navy Estimates were thus reduced 50 per cent, then for very shame's sake the Army Estimates and all the other damnable monstrosities would be reduced *pro rata*.

What I am writing to you is going to be effective! We aren't going on paying four guineas for a pair of shoes! The country will rise and sweep out these rich nincompoops and self-seeking opportunists who

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at present bear rule over us! Not one of them has the courage of a louse or the backbone of a slug.

Yours,

Fisher

Postscript. Also we are going to stand by France! This war was to get rid of Prussian militarism. It holds the field in Germany. The German Prime Minister is still called 'the Imperial Chancellor'! Our politicians quashed the independent German Republics like they did the Russian Republic! And a Prussian Army marched down and wiped out the Bavarian Republic, etc.!

Was there ever such a Peace perpetrated in the whole history of the world?

Does anyone imagine poor France is ever going to get a farthing of her indemnity or a pound of coal from the Germans? And the franc, worth 9½d. at the Armistice, is now only worth 3d. However, this is their own fault. They won't tax themselves in France.

593: TO QUEEN ALEXANDRA¹

19, St. James's Square

April 19th, 1920

Lord Fisher's humble duty and he must dictate this answer to your Sweet Majesty's heavenly letter, as he cannot yet hold a pen to write, being still very weak. He cannot tell you how Your Majesty's letter, just come, has delighted him. His best remembrances in life are wrapped up in your Majesty and King Edward. Such splendid friends when all the world was hostile in getting the English Navy ready to smash those German beasts who took every woman out of Lille into Germany for their bestial lusts. It is fashionable now to forget these awful crimes committed against women by the Germans, verified by Lord Bryce's Commission, all whose sympathies were pro-German, and Lord Bryce had to say there were some crimes against women that it was impossible to print.

I have been five weeks in bed and had two operations — I might

¹ The Queen had written (April 18th) of her 'distress' over Fisher's serious illness. 'Please let me know how you are getting on, as I never forget our precious old Admiral Fisher.'

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say three. Thanks to Sir Frederick Treves I had a splendid surgeon, Mr. Kidd, who thinks I have done wonderfully, considering I am in my eightieth year, and says I shall be stronger than ever when recovered. I felt I got within sight of the 'Pearly Gates' after the second operation and am deeply thankful for my recovery so far. The 'Candle of the Lord', our dear Sub-Dean, has been my great consolation, and the Duchess of Hamilton kindly allowed me to have the operation in this house, which Mr. Kidd, the Surgeon, says is the best in London for me to have been in, and she and others have given me a most wonderful attention and sympathy, for I had very bad pain.

I think this is enough to trouble your Majesty with. I am going to see Lord Knollys as soon as I am strong enough. Though my body is weak, my mind is more fighting than ever, and I get off a letter to *The Times* now and then without Mr. Kidd or the nurses knowing it! And then there is a row and I promise not to do it again, but I do. . . .

Your Majesty's humble servant,

Fisher

594: TO SIR WILLIAM WATSON

19, St. James's Square
May 24th, 1920

My dear Sir William Watson,

Your poetry-breathing, delightful letter has just this moment been read by me, and I hasten surreptitiously to dictate this answer. I am not allowed to write, being very weak in body with resulting weakness in mind, so if I fail to express my feelings with the amplitude I desire, put it down to the vile body and not to the immortal soul. By the by, I suppose poetry, of which your letter is full, is the Bovril of prose. I suppose the poet would put into a single stanza what the ordinary prose fool would take a whole magazine article to exemplify!

You ask as to my health. This is my 70th day in bed, and 10 days since my last operation (four in all), and experts tell me that I really am now travelling back from the swollen banks of Jordan. (Didn't Jordan overflow all its banks when Joshua went across?) I hope the experts' belief may prove correct as to my recovery, as I would love, as you so delightfully express it, to smite a few more blows with Thor's hammer. Please God I will.

I have been much exhilarated at the same moment of receiving

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your letter at having sent me *Walsh's New Zealand Magazine* of March 1920, containing an article entitled 'Fisher on Democracy'. This far-distant magazine contains the only word of praise for what I humbly believe to be the most righteous, the most important, and the most opportune words I ever wrote. I ask in this article of mine, I entreat of my countrymen, to anticipate a sure revolution. I ask for real leaders of those masses of our people who want justice, and will have it, and not for leaders who 'wait on the doormat'. I say 'equal opportunity for all', and that we fight God when our social system dooms a brilliant, clever child of a poor father to the same level as his father, and I say that Liberty means a country where every man or woman has an equal chance. Suffice it to say that Thomas Walsh, of 47, Phoenix Chambers, Auckland, New Zealand, has given me a great reward, and I pass it on to you in the fullness of my heart, observing that he alludes to the great hymn for our Commonwealth of Nations which you are the only man in the least qualified to give us. There is a Celestial Chorus by Dean Alford:¹

'Forward be our watchword,
Not a look behind'!

It contains the whole duty of man towards his God and his Country.
Yours,

Fisher

P.S. It is rather interesting that after all my life fighting external parasites, animate and inanimate (on one occasion I got rid of 19½ million sterling of both sorts), I should now have been at death's door in getting rid of an internal parasite (a d—d prostate gland) in the 80th year of my age.

595: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on June 1st, 1920]

Sir,

I. Peace. We have recently officially been told of a number of wars we are still waging! *Stop them!* We don't want any more of the earth's surface. Believe me, Sir, that we have only as yet scratched the surface of the globe as regards Oil. The other things we are fighting for had best be left alone.

¹ Rev. Josiah G. Alford, Canon Residentiary of Bristol.

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II. Retrenchment. Can't the Prime Minister resume the Gladstonian *rôle* and be Chancellor of the Exchequer, so as to meet the present distress? He would then only have to send for each of his subordinates and say to him, 'Take your bill and write down quickly a reduction of 50 per cent., or else "*Out You Go!*"'

III. Reform. Abolish the present Bureaucratic tyranny! Mr. Asquith, who ought to know, calls the present House of Commons 'servile'. So we seem 'cornered'.

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. What I presume will be the end of the present spendthrift Government will be that no one will be such an amazing ass as to lend them any money, not even a £10 note!

We shall pull through all right, as England never succumbs. The individuality of the Englishman nothing baffles. We have been lions led by asses since the time of Alfred the Great! What has been won by the sword has been given up by the pen! Java, Sumatra, Curaçao, Minorca, Tangier, the Argentine, Delagoa Bay, etc. I have said it to you before, but repetition is the soul of journalism, as your great Editor, Mr. Barnes, truly said.

Notwithstanding all that has happened, we have emerged from the war *the* great nation. I don't say this. One of the greatest American citizens says so. He hoped it would be his own country. He knew it was going to be one of the two.

596: TO SIR THOMAS MACKENZIE

19, St. James's Square
June 3rd, 1920

Dear Sir Thomas,

I have been told you are leaving England, and if it is true, I wish to send you a few words of very cordial and affectionate remembrance of what you and Mr. Andrew Fisher and Mr. Roch did for me at the Dardanelles Commission. I enclose you a copy of a letter I wrote to Sir William Watson, the great poet, where you will see some distant New Zealander has given me praise that I never got at home. I hope you got back safely the two books you sent for my signature. I am obliged to dictate this letter, as I am very weak in

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body after four operations and this is my 80th day in more or less pain and discomfort. I am off to the country on Sunday for six months' absolute quietude. The surgeons say they have cured me, but they have left my body a wreck. Don't trouble to answer.

Yours,

Fisher

597: FROM SIR THOMAS MACKENZIE

New Zealand Government Offices
Strand, W.C.2
June 7th, 1920

Dear Lord Fisher,

I was delighted to receive your kind and affectionate letter.

We felt at the Dardanelles Commission that they wished to entangle you with responsibility, but fortunately the experience of Mr Fisher and myself as Prime Ministers in our respective countries enabled us to see at a glance how correct was your line of action, and how wrong was the attitude of members of the Commission in endeavouring to place you in a false position. I greatly admired the manner in which you gave your evidence, and I have on many occasions taken the liberty of referring to it when talking with my friends.

Most sincerely I wish you well out of your long and trying illness. On this point I can be sympathetic, as I went through a similar operation about 16 months ago. But it will make a new man of you. I have not turned a hair since, and am as fit as a fiddle, and that is how we all wish to see you.

Thank you so much for writing in my copy of your book. I shall treasure it, for it will become a heirloom, and I shall also treasure the letter you have sent me.

In the words of our beautiful Maori language, Kia Ora, Kia Ora, Kia Ora (which mean Love, Affection and Good Luck).

Believe me,

Ever yours sincerely,

T. Mackenzie

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598: TO SIR THOMAS MACKENZIE

Ferne House
June 9th, 1920

My dear Sir Thomas Mackenzie,

I have just received your much valued reply to my letter of regret at being unable to do honour to you before you leave England, when you kindly cheered me by telling me you had undergone the same operation, and with such complete success. The only difference is that like the great Venetian Doge Dandolo I am in my 80th year, and *Anno Domini* goes a long way.

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. I hope you appreciate as much as I do those splendid lines referring to Dandolo capturing Constantinople in his 80th year:

‘Oh! for one hour of blind old Dandolo,
Th’octogenarian chief. Byzantium’s conquering foe!’

I do hope we two may meet again.

P.S. I can’t well hold my pen, but must add a word of ‘Great Delight’ for your Maori blessing! So lovely! But we have an ‘Angel Guard’ surpassing even the most beauteous of these Heathen Gems! Only it requires ‘Vision’ to realize our Celestial Guide, which is ‘Conscience’! That is what the Bible calls ‘the Angel of His Presence’ (always there!). I send you the uncorrected beginning of a new book pressed upon me. Kindly return at your leisure.

Yours,

Fisher

599: TO SIR ALFRED YARROW

Ferne House
[June 9th, 1920]

Grievously disappointed not being with you to-day to join in a splendid enterprise for bringing together all sorts and conditions of

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men!¹ IT WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT! Like the grain of mustard seed it will grow to large dimensions. As for yourself, the five greatest words in the Bible are those which describe the greatest ever on this earth. *They are these!* 'HE WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD'.

600: TO SIR ERNEST HODDER-WILLIAMS

Ferne House
June 11th, 1920

Dear Sir Ernest,

I am dictating you these few lines to say that having been pronounced cured as regards the surgical side, I was brought down here on Sunday with every possible care and luxury in an invalid carriage, and was none the better for it. We had, yesterday afternoon, the great medical man of this part of the world, Dr. Hyla Greves, of Bournemouth, who kindly came forty miles to see me, and though extremely weak physically, he seems to be confident I shall pull through, as apparently my arteries are much younger than my age. He is quite astonished that I am alive after four such operations so near each other, so after all I hope still not to disappoint you of what I really think will be a very racy volume. I hope your lawyer will take his courage in both hands and not leave out the tit-bits! Perhaps it would be best to bring it out in America . . .

Yours,

Fisher

601: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on June 12th, 1920]

Sir,

Our plutocratic, effete, despicable House of Commons, computed to possess the control of 500 millions sterling, still wends its 'servile' way (as Mr. Asquith says!) and allows Lord Islington's impregnable

¹ Yarrow was the founder of a village club at Hindhead, opened that day by the Duchess of Hamilton: the Beacon Hill Village Club, intended 'to provide a centre of social, physical, and mental activity and recreation, and to promote good fellowship among the inhabitants of the district'. Later in the month Fisher wrote Yarrow: 'I'm abounding with delight at the success of your great adventure! It will spread and be the most socialistic anti-socialist weapon to deal with Bolshevism.'

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Mesopotamian letter to be ignored, and 'Observer's' splendid letter in *The Times* of Tuesday to pass unheeded, and countless remonstrances against clothing the Army in red and gold treated with malignant glee by the military satraps, pining for the good old days of 'pipe clay' and the 'button stick'! The so-called Labour leaders have not a touch of Parnell or Bradlaugh in them! They are all snobs and 'door-matters'. (By the way — when on earth are we going to get rid of that Hun word 'Empire' and substitute 'Commonwealth', and have a 'Commonwealth Hymn' as glorious as the American Battle Hymn or the Covenanters' Psalm at Drumclog, led by their God to victory?) Now this is the pith of this letter — Are we, as a great and free nation, going to take it lying down that these rulers of ours, who are in power by a trick, and continue in power by conjuring tricks, are to tax us to the utmost limit and spend our money on wild-cat 'Mesopotamianisms' and military millinery and ludicrous Admiralty 'lookings' for a war against non-existent Navies, and a bureaucratic tyranny worse than that of the Russian Empire, and all the time leaving the 'one thing needful' — the air supremacy of this country — a despised appanage of War Office nincompoops and Admiralty asses who possess no 'vision'? Solomon sagely observed, 'Where there is no vision the people perish' (*Proverbs* 29, verse 18).

Yours,

Fisher

...

602: TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE TIMES'

[published on June 14th, 1920]

Sir,

Forgive my damnable reiteration! 'Reiteration is the secret of conviction!' It sells Buggins's soap and somebody's little liver pills! Advertising is the soul of business and the secret of political success. As a dear friend once said to me (he's very eminent!), 'I don't care a d—n what they say of me so long as they say something.' (And they have!!!) Advertising is reiteration! 'Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform' was my last letter but one to you under 'Observer's' splendid letter of June 1.¹ (The man who wrote that letter 'loveth our nation'

¹ 'Observer's' letter (*The Times*, June 1st) was a critique of one aspect of the Government's financial policy: the 'vast and vague responsibilities which we are undertaking abroad'.

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and you well know to be justly famous!) Someone has tersely said, 'We raise our voices against the madness of illimitable commitments and indefinite responsibilities' (Mesopotamia and Palestine). It's insane to have Crystal Palace follies, etc., and to spend an extra three millions on a d—d gaudy substitute for 'the immortal khaki of the trenches', when we are suffering from the most exacting system of taxation ever known in this world! (Will Limehouse end by swallowing the Tories, or have the Tories swallowed him?) Alas! Mr. Bonar Law! What a fatal mistake you made swallowing the Coalition Pill on May 17, 1915!!! That very night you were sure of turning out the Government and winning the war! You know it! but you became a minority of one in the Cabinet instead! and also became a participant in '14 times too late' as so vividly portrayed in Mr. Lloyd George's most famous speech!

Yours,

Fisher

P.S. The one secret of our greatness has been an effective Parliamentary Opposition ready to take on the government of the country at a moment's notice! That was killed by the Coalition Government. We are now what we are in Parliament through that supposed great patriotic feat! It was an artful trick! It is leading us to bankruptcy and ruin because there is no Opposition!

603: FROM H. WICKHAM STEED¹

The Times
Printing House Square, E.C.
June 14th, 1920

Dear Lord Fisher,

I was so busy last night that I could not write to thank you for your latest contribution to our anti-waste campaign, but now, by way of showing my gratitude, I am writing to scold you for having written it! To tell the truth — which is a luxury only to be enjoyed in moderation by admirals as by journalists — I liked the substance of your letter better than the handwriting. Though I am not an expert on graphology, I read so many letters from so many people whom I like and from so many more whom I like less or dislike, that I have a

¹ Wickham Steed, Editor of *The Times*, 1919-1922.

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shrewd notion whether they are physically fit to write them. I do not believe that, for the moment, your body is as fit as your mind; and one of the best ways of getting your body fit again will be to give your mind a rest. Much as the journalist in me would wish to see you fill half a column daily, the friend in me prompts me to threaten you with complete exclusion from the columns of *The Times* until your physician gives you a clean bill of health and you are able to send a medical certificate along with your next production. The country is going to the dogs all right, but you will have time to get well before it gets there; and you will have all the more strength to haul it back when you have a *corpus sanum* to obey the orders of a *mens sana*. Meanwhile if you do not obey *my* orders, you will receive them with the damndest kind of iteration whenever you are insubordinate.

Your affectionate and impertinent

Wickham Steed

604: TO THE W. T. STEAD MEMORIAL COMMITTEE¹

Ferne House
June 30th, 1920

Lord Fisher has never regretted in all his life any episode more than his enforced absence on July 5 from the unveiling of W. T. Stead's portrait bronze, but he is too weak in body to attend by that date.

Stead was a consummate journalist — he was an honest man — and (thank God) he possessed the 'Insanity of Genius', which will hand him down to posterity as 'a Famous Man'; he was a lover of his country — and, like John the Baptist, he 'constantly spoke the truth, boldly rebuked vice, and patiently endured for the truth's sake!'

¹ A portrait bronze, erected by British and American journalists, was to be unveiled on the Thames Embankment on July 5th. 'When your letter was read, everyone cheered. I was very glad to hear the recognition of you by the journalists' (Arnold White to Fisher, July 6th, 1920).

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605: TO CECIL V. FISHER

Ferne House
July 3rd, 1920

Dearest Cis,

. . . I am not getting on quite so well as was expected, on account of the neuralgia being so constant, which again is chiefly the result of weakness. . . .

Best love to you all.

Yours,

Fisher

I'm sorry I've lost 5 pounds in weight this week. I'm 9 stone 4 lbs. this morning — barely that. Last Saturday I was 9 stone 9 lbs. But once I get rid of this neuralgia, I shall get on.

606: TO ADMIRAL JOHN MORESBY¹

Ferne House
July 6th, 1920

My dear old Moresby,

I am dictating these few lines to you to show you I have you in remembrance. I have had a serious setback. They tried the X-ray treatment on me before leaving London, and the shock was too great. But I have a very eminent physician looking after me, and he takes a cheerful view.

Don't you trouble to answer this.

Yours,

Fisher

607: FROM SIR OSWYN MURRAY²

Admiralty, Whitehall
July 14th, 1920

Sir,

I am commanded by my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to inform you that they have received with the deepest regret the

¹ This may have been the Admiral's last letter.

² Murray, Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty, 1917-1936. The letter was addressed to Cecil Fisher.

EPILOGUE, 1919-1920

intelligence of the death of your father, Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, G.C.B., O.M., G.C.V.O., LL.D. The extraordinary services which your father rendered during his long and distinguished career in the Royal Navy, both in the Navy itself and in administration offices on shore, are too well known to be recounted here. There is no part in the multitudinous activities of modern naval service in which his influence has not been felt. The nation has been fortunate in having at its disposal, during the greatest period of naval development and progress the world has seen, Lord Fisher's unrivalled qualities of untiring zeal, brilliant genius, and whole-hearted devotion. His remarkable abilities were displayed alike in the technical development of the Fleet and all its appurtenances, in the training and education of the personnel of the Royal Navy, and in the strategical disposition of the Sea Forces of the country, both in preparation for and in actual operations of war, and three successive Sovereigns and their Ministers have enjoyed the benefit of his counsels during one of the most critical and eventful periods of the history of this realm. His loss is irreparable, but their lordships are glad that he lived to see the triumphant conclusion of his labours in the surrender of the German Fleet, and the successful issue of the late war. My lords desire me to express to you their profound sympathy with you and with the rest of his family in their bereavement, which is, indeed, shared not only by the Royal Navy, but by the Empire.

I am, Sir, your obedient Servant,

(Sir) O. Murray

APPENDIX

DRAFT CHAPTERS OF *VISIONS*¹

‘Where there is no vision the people perish.’ — SOLOMON

PREAMBLE

I am not able to verify the exact words, but I believe Dean Inge, in his rare appreciation of some of the English Mystics, uses some such words as these — (if I have added or distorted I hope he will forgive an admiring devotee!):—

‘The richness of emotional life determines the intensity of the Vision.’

Again:—

‘Our heritage of glorious passion can (not only) be squandered (that we all know well enough) but it can also be hoarded and it perishes unused.’

Further:

‘The spendthrift of his emotions gets something! The miser of them may gain the whole world, but he has lost his own soul!!’

Note:

Sir William Watson (the Poet) is of opinion that the rendering of this passage should be: ‘What shall a man get in exchange for his soul?’ That is (Sir William adds) ‘What shall he get to make the exchange worth his while!’

The cloistered mystics of whom Dean Inge writes ‘sacrificed breadth for intensity’. (I prefer ‘intensity’ myself.) ‘Brilliant’ people are always ‘Shallow’ — The Deep Stream is placid! — The shallow brook sparkles and attracts with its lovely exuberance!

Such is the excuse for foisting a third volume of disjointed (though concentrated) thoughts concerning an ‘Emotional Life’ on, more especially, the ‘young in Life’ to encourage them never to repress their emotions, but to encourage them (to foster them) in the ‘watered garden’ of the Soul! The ‘emotional’ not the ‘brainy’ man

¹ In Fisher’s hand at the beginning: ‘The Title of the Book is “Visions”. Uncorrected Proof. Requires many alterations and additions — This is only as first dictated on impulse, but “impulses” come from Heaven! F. 24.2.20.’ The material following ‘Selah’ (p. 639) was dictated a week or so later and set up in proof. The last section, ‘Miracles’, was dictated to the Duchess of Hamilton on May 8th-9th, and presumably was intended for *Visions*. Clearly all the material was in pretty rough form.

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is this world's saviour and exemplar — for with him Faith is All in all — and the mountains of imbecility 'remove hence' at his enthusiasms and his beliefs! So these fleeting words are cast forth in the hope that in them, 'after many days', may be found Salvation.

Nelson was peculiarly 'a man of Visions!' — This side of his gloriousness has never been depicted — It's only 'brainy' people who have written about him! — How could such respond to those beautiful tones in his nature which forgot the World and Prize Money and Ambition in the singleness of 'High Aims' in his heart, and such Gentleness as made the common sailors (we have it from eye-witnesses) weep at his loss to them in their hour of Victory as he passed the Gate of Death. His faults were the excesses of his virtues. (We wouldn't wish him without those witnesses!) The fact of asking pecuniary help for his friend at the hour of death showed him 'poverty-stricken' though he could have possessed prize money beyond all his compeers. These few words are to excuse, or rather explain, his presence in this volume — and it may be to some others (as to him who now says it) 'a Great Aspiration' (or 'Inspiration' if you like that feeling better!) Otherwise this book has no Model — a simple chronicle of what its title says, 'Visions'.

('When in my silent, solitary walk, I sought a strain not all unworthy Thee.')

I am quite sure my favourite words are those of Jeremiah. (I hear a New Life just written of him that does him credit! but *what a time for him to wait!!!*)

He says:—'Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not!' (I think Chap. xlv. verse 5. They (the Great Things) come if unsought!)

Dean Inge is lovely on those early Mystics who flourished about A.D. 1300.

'Spendthrifts in their Emotions!'

While the Miser therein — Self-repressing — resisting — thinking those holy feelings lures of the Devil — loses his own Soul! So I always preach the Word

'REGARDLESS'

Give rein to all your impulses! If the World is shocked — tell it to go to the Devil as you won't!

While I am on these Mystics, I think their Cardinal Vices were sweet!

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The Mystics'	1. Low Aims.
Cardinal Vices	2. Despondency.
were four	3. Moral Cowardice.
	4. Intellectual Arrogance.

In some ancient fable I discovered in a worm-eaten book (it says) Satan was allowed when kicked out of Heaven to take one and only one weapon for the ruin of mankind. He chose 'Despondency'.

Lord F. *loquitur*:

'Mind I don't say these things — I am not a Saint. I am only an Echo — I am the "Sounding Board" over the Pulpit to make "The Voice" go further. I am the Sign Post directing you the road to Heaven — The Sign Post don't go there.

Selah'

Postscript

I do not attempt to give a life of Nelson. It wants a book-worm (one who burrows through endless amorphous details) for such a task!

I prefer with Bishop Magee 'the Big Brush of Enthusiasm' depicting with Imaginative Effects the workings of the mind of a Great Spirit!

What concerns us in a man is not a Boswellian account of what he had for breakfast — but the Miltonian grandeur of Warburton's descriptive Halo round Nelson's head as the Great Hero despite all Remonstrance burst in the darkness on Brueys' Fleet which lay confidently secure behind the shoals of Aboukir, and as Napoleon so grandly said of it (this Nelsonian Destruction) in his last days at St. Helena, 'Had I conquered Egypt I had conquered the World . . . but you English wherever there is water come your Ships!' — So was it with Nelson at the Nile!

An Episode such as that of the Nile relates more than years of the book-worm's toil amidst the maligning tittle-tattle of the Scandalizers! — Miss Knight's — Jeaffreson's¹ — and other adultery-loving and garbage-seeking Vultures who love Carrion and find Mightiness of Soul both insipid and incomprehensible!

So I divide up Nelson as follows:—

NELSON

('He being dead — yet speaketh.')

¹ The *Autobiography of Miss Ellis Cornelia Knight* (2 vols., London, 1861) — she belonged to the Nelson-Hamilton circle at one time — is one of the principal authorities on Nelson's Neapolitan period; John C. Jeaffreson, English writer of novels and biographies, including *Lady Hamilton and Lord Nelson* (1888).

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PRÉCIS OF CHAPTER I

If someone asked me to portray the most pathetic scene in human (not holy) history, I would without hesitation draw attention to our Great Hero consummating a glorious life after 'a hundred fights!' — (Some unknown Admiralty clerk officially 'ragged' him for details why he should have a pension for wounds! — That's how we know about those fights!) — I would describe Nelson, in that exultant moment in which he was about to ascend like another Elijah in the glory of 'a chariot of fire and horses of fire' after an unparalleled victory (so beautifully and vividly noted at the moment in the Log Book of the 'Victory', that having thus saved his country 'He THEN died of his wounds'). Yes, and all round our Hero even the common sailors, what they said to each other has fortune'd to come down to us! It was Elisha *da capo*!! — as Nelson (like another Elijah) was taken from them: — 'And Elisha saw it and he cried — My Father, My Father — The Chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him [Elijah] no more!'¹

What was the peculiar pathos of this scene of Nelson's death? It was this — He was dying a poor man — His last thoughts and his last words implied that he had no money for the support of her who had nursed him and loved him, and so he asked his country to provide for her! Yet what was the end? Some say she found a pauper's grave in a foreign land — and that an unknown passing Englishman paid for [the] funeral! Whether it be so or not — is it not the most pathetic story in the world? I know no other comparable! *N.B.* — It may be inferred from correspondence that he had to borrow the money to pay for his Post Chaise to Portsmouth from Merton to embark for Trafalgar!

Synopsis of Chapters

CHAPTER I

'The Pathos'

He was a neglected man — and hardly treated — (only 'the Common People' saw him off to his Death!)

(Here insert the picture of his crowded triumph — the boat's crew getting him to his boat through the worshipping multitude! But no one of high estate was there — no Court Official — no Admiralty Lord!)

¹ 2 *Kings* ii, 12.

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CHAPTER II

Nelson's frail body and his very human weaknesses.

CHAPTER III

Nelson's Glories.

CHAPTER IV

Nelson's Visions.

CHAPTER V

Nelson's Soul.

CHAPTER VI

Nelson's Sayings.

CHAPTER VII

His Portrait (By a Friend)

FINIS

(Stead's Apotheosis!)

(Immortal Words.)

Postscript

Imagine Nelson being unemployed and on Half-Pay when he returned from the Nile and before Trafalgar. He was impecuniously on half-pay and borrowing money from his banker for the small requirements of his humble home at Merton!

Yes — In the most perilous time ever known to England of War on the Sea, Nelson was slighted and unemployed and this happens on the brink of the greatest Fight at Sea ever known. He is unattended and alone in his journey to the *Victory* at Spithead, his last home. Well may Lord Rosebery say that this neglect of Nelson appealed to the Common People and made him the dearer to them. Napoleon said of himself 'Adversity was wanting in my career!' A wonderful saying! — as good as his saying 'Imagination rules the World' or 'Consistency is the Genius of Mediocrity'.

N.B. — I have an idea! — Nelsonic and Napoleonc Epigrams in Juxtaposition. — How Educating! — and how illuminating their diverse yet wondrous characters! What food for a soliloquy by the Author of 'The Last Phase'!¹

¹ Rosebery's book, *Napoleon: the Last Phase* (1900).

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Appendix

My friend Mr. J. G. Swift Macneill obtained from the Irish Lord Primate (Dr. Crozier) a sermon His Grace had preached in St. Patrick's Cathedral on the text 'Where there is no Vision — the People perish.'

And I have had the advantage of scanning the Lord Primate's beautiful application of the text to both Mundane and Heavenly Business. I have elsewhere commented on the well-known universal worldly contempt for what are called 'Visionaries' and the Archbishop aptly in this regard refers to Joseph and his Brethren, 'Behold this Dreamer cometh' (Genesis 19, v. 37). 'The Dreamer' saved Egypt in the time of Famine and 'laid the foundation of the greatness of an indestructible race' (says the Archbishop in this sermon), and more excellent still he calls up Moses, Isaiah and St. Paul as three remarkable 'Seers' taken as mad and visionary by their fellows:

But they were practical men.

Moses made an Army out of a rabble of Slaves, after his 'Vision' of the Burning Bush.

Isaiah re-invigorated his Native Land after seeing the 'Vision' of the King in His Beauty.

St. Paul the greatest Missionary the World ever has known after his 'Vision' approaching Damascus!

But I prefer myself the Telescope of Faith as best expounding the means whereby 'perception' of Visions comes to us.

We have Realities unperceived all about us.

(The Visionary does not create (as the Archbishop says) he perceives.)

On a starry night the naked eye sees an unstarred space — a telescope will reveal that space studded with heavenly citizens — So it is with the Angels — They are all around us 'always' — only we don't perceive them but the Telescope of Faith reveals them!

What a beautiful Collect is that of the Angels and how sweet it is that it is the Collect for Nelson's Birthday!

'O Everlasting God who has ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order: Mercifully grant, that as Thy holy Angels "always" do Thee service in heaven, so by Thy appointment they may succour and defend us here on earth: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

A devoted friend makes this note on this Preamble.

Sir William Watson's rendering is true and so fine that it deserved engraving on marble in platinum in every home. One paragraph

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from Lord Fisher expounding that verity would render the Vision visible and intelligible to the average man.

Brilliant people are shallow only when they try to shine. The desire to shine is a foible of the Jews. Its absence a conceit of the English. Both are forms of Self Esteem.

The last paragraph is too sweeping. Brainyness is the Curse of our education: the suppression of emotion the curse of Society. But people both brainy and with feelings *have* written about Nelson though no human being has yet written with knowledge. Only a man and a woman in unison can reveal Nelson as he seemed to his God! What he seemed to himself or to the public is written to rags.

A dear friend writes to me:—

Conscience *not* Logic makes fine men and women and fine Governments too. The Spanish Inquisition was quite logical.

My note as regards 'Conscience' and 'Logic' is this:—

No Parson that I am aware of has expounded either in sermon or book that 'Conscience' is God. 'Conscience' is really and truly what is so often spoken of in the Bible as 'The Angel of God' appearing to someone. Sometimes it's 'The Angel of God's Presence'. Sometimes we are told of a certain man's 'Angel'. Of the little children it says 'Their Angels do always behold the Face of my Father'. So without doubt Conscience is God's Messenger forming part of the Personality. Therefore my beloved friend who writes to me the above words about 'Conscience being above Logic' obviously hits the target.

To Saint Paul Logic was man's foolishness. It's not the Wise that go to the Kingdom of Heaven — it's the Wayfaring Man and the Fool (this is how these simple Saints appear to the wise Logician). Yes! To the '4 Dimension' Agnostics of the Athenaeum Club the simple Christian Faith is utter foolishness.

A SOLILOQUY ON 'VAIN IMAGINATIONS'

'The mixt multitude that fell a lusting.'

Numbers, Chap. II, verse 4.

There is no question that Abraham Lincoln's special peculiarity of loving to illustrate and augment his arguments by the tales he so usually told his audiences has the abiding merit of being founded on the pure teaching of Holy Writ!

From Abraham and Moses onwards (and culminating in 'The Great Nazarene!') the 'Parable' or similitude has always possessed a fascinating charm, and Burton (and other Oriental travellers)

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relate to us of the Story Tellers of the Bazaar, how they never failed to have a listening crowd to enchant and instruct!

And so it is that 'Human Nature' (being the same yesterday, to-day and for ever) we always are ourselves enchained by the antient records of the Hebrews who in *their* Wilderness (so like ourselves in *our* Wilderness and also in *our* Desert (of 'Sin') we loathe our Manna of 'Comfortable Words' so beautifully and bountifully provided by Heaven and yearn for the 'Past Pleasures'!

(But more especially are we indifferent to those most 'Comfortable Words' of all, that occur in the finest Memorial Service (of so beautiful a design in its simplicity) as instituted and ordained as a Holy Mystery by the Great Nazarene on that Immemorial Thursday night before Calvary!)

Yes! We remember also in our own peculiar ways (each for himself):—

'The fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely: the cucumbers, the melons, and the leeks and onions!'

And with licentious Desire and wicked gloatings over our past heathenish remembrances, we pine for the Midianitish delights, that even made Moses succumb to Hobab's daughter!

'Ichabod' is the exclamation!

The Saviour

The Predecessor of Pontius Pilate as Roman Governor at Jerusalem was Lentulus. He describes Our Saviour with a very strange saying. Lentulus's exact words are:—

'Nobody has seen him laugh.'

Evidently all the antient portrayments of the Saviour seem to be correct according to the description of Him given by this Lentulus. His hair lying flat on his head was parted in the middle falling on his shoulders with crisp curls, his hands were small and beautifully shaped, and his beard was somewhat parted in the centre. He was of average height and a well set up body, indeed he had a goodly presence that attracted attention. He had a straight nose and his brow was level and serene.

MONTE CARLO

'DAWN TO TWILIGHT'

(A Study in Moral Philosophy)

'Where every prospect pleases

And only man is vile!'

(Missionary Hymn by BISHOP HEBER)

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BISHOP JEREMY TAYLOR, in that exquisite book of his, *Holy Living and Dying*, tells us that we should all be curious to see the Sun coming forth to his Day's Work! I've seen him so arise in many a clime and on many an Ocean, but never in such glory as at the very moment that I am dictating this at Monte Carlo! I am lost in ecstasy in now beholding on the Sea Horizon a Turneresque Effect beyond anything portrayed even by that great Genius of Colour and Magnificent Imagination! (and yet Turner was a skin-flint in buying bad scraps of canvas and cheap-jack paints).

One cannot fathom why this peculiar beauty (which I am now viewing with astonished admiration) should occur here at Monte Carlo! And yet apart from vice I know no spot on Earth more prone to virtue, for this reason — that all Heaven's Beauties are so bountifully bestowed here!

Let me enumerate some of the gifts accorded to this Paradise and which so deliciously present themselves to a jaded mind!

(1) Dirt, Squalor, Poverty are all and each banished from this Empyrean Bower! No Tax-gatherer is here! No beggar is possible! A Scavenger (in princely uniform) picks up even a single leaf, lest it mar the perfection of the Heavenly Scene, and a discarded match is pounced on as if it were a bomb about to explode, and put in the basket of the princely 'Gardiens' (numerous and lynx-eyed).

(2) In the astounding Gardens and on the Terraces flowers of the Torrid Zone mingle in friendship with the hardy blooms of northern climes. They are all in equally luxurious blossom, bowered amidst rare shrubs of the West Indies with a huge background of majestic Palm trees, that even the Hebrews could have seen no greater in that famous cluster of the seventy Palm trees that so entranced them, and Moses also, in their pilgrimage to the Promised Land. Hibiscus, Azaleas, Cannas and other shrubs that one only sees on the Equator thrive here abundantly, overshadowed by India-rubber trees as big as Oaks, and Banana trees thinking themselves in Jamaica or Honduras, but above all and everything it is the Palm Trees of Engedi, which so manifest themselves by hundreds, wherever one wanders, that is really the characteristic of this Elysian Habitation, where 'Every prospect pleases and only man is vile!'

(3) Music is here 'in excelsis'. And an Opera ticket is just one-third the price of any Opera House in Europe. It has the largest Orchestra in the whole world, not excepting the Argentine.

(4) The Baths rival those at Tusculum! Every variety and also every form of medical ingenuity are here, and the finest Zandov

APPENDIX

Institute for physical culture I've ever seen! Marble from Carnara to tread upon and furnish the walls, and thus render clients immune from the absorption of either damp or microbes, and the price of the baths is less than their cost! (all provided by the Administration). The Golf-course is unparalleled for its beauty and its extravagances, and the Panorama in all directions is not beaten by that of Rio de Janeiro or the Bay of Naples, and we bought ladies' hats and female garments exquisite in taste and transcending Bond Street and the Rue de la Paix at half the usual robber prices. The Hôtel de Paris shines forth as the most famous in Europe, and Monsieur Fleury, a miracle of tact, never knows the antecedents of any of his guests however inquisitive the British Mrs. Grundy may be!

The above does not claim to give the whole Beatific Vision. As I heard a great preacher once expound in a sermon of eight minutes: 'It's lucky the Bible tells us so little of Heaven, or we shouldn't get on with our work down here!'

It may be, however, that the Devil does in this Oasis in the Desert deliciously coat his pills with sugar and possibly enchant his dupes (perhaps I am one of them) with the sweet palatableness of his 'Meringues' of Vice. Anyhow vice does not here either repel or attract the sober Mind of the 'wise-hearted' Wayfarer by any open manifestation of the forked tail, or the cloven hoof, such as I have seen in a Magnificent Watering-place where only Good People ever go, and a foreign King was Master of the Ceremonies. (I confess, however, I have not been in the 'Sporting' here at 4 a.m.)

I have never been at Monte Carlo before. Imagine not finding Paradise till one's eightieth year! Such is Life!

This thought now comes into my mind. I have heard disputations against Missionaries that by material and earthly blandishments they cajole the inhabitants of the Dark Places of the Earth into becoming converts to the Christian Faith. If true, is not their practice based on the earliest knowledge of enticement! What is the promise of Moses to the Hebrews? Not the Kingdom of Heaven in their hearts, but —

Your threshing shall reach unto the Vintage,
And the Vintage shall reach unto the Sowing Time:
And ye shall eat your bread to the full,
And dwell in your land safely.

Leviticus, Ch. xxvi, verse 5.

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As a celebrated French Admiral once said to me in the purest of English, 'The belly comes first!'

Yes! (he added) the Belly comes even before Patriotism!

Postscript

I have forgotten to observe that the beautiful green grass here is sown in the Winter and utterly dies in the Summer, scorched to death by the Sun, and the Arbutus, no longer a bush here but a tree, gives forth oceans of scent. It has a fruit absolutely similar to a large strawberry — and this morning I saw a Climbing Rose near the Gambling House of the deepest violet hue (like the eyes of the Irish women) and so luxuriant in its effulgence of glory that I turned aside to gaze upon it and reflected how Hell by its gains gave us here a Heaven to gaze upon!

N.B. — Perhaps the most wicked business here is shooting at mutilated pigeons — mutilated to prevent their too easy escape. A great sportsman once said to me that real sport was when the thing sported with had a chance to kill back again, like a lion or tiger!

Hell nudges Heaven at Monte Carlo! —

They touch each other here!

There's another Contrast:—

At noon the Sun makes you feel yourself on the Equator —

At Sunset you feel yourself in the Arctic!

'All the Company of Heaven'

I have been told that these beautiful words, and so majestic a conception, originated with Archbishop Cranmer, whose head was cut off by Henry VIII, after assisting the Secretary of State Cromwell, and Coverdale, Bishop of Exeter, in producing that Masterpiece of the World the Great Bible (and we must regret that only the Prayer-book Psalms have been retained for our use from that Paragon of the English language at its maximum).

'The Company of Heaven' is, I think, more beautifully portrayed by Victor Hugo than, at all events, I myself ever read or heard. His immortal Abbey 'Bien Aimé' is the very essence of the 'Company of Heaven'. It is not a fancy portrait — I know such a one.

We only found out by accident from a bedridden blind woman in a slum in Westminster that a gentleman, whose name she didn't know, came to read to her every day for an hour. It was the hour that he was supposed to have to himself for his lunch. To this day he doesn't

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know that we know it, nor would I for the world have him know, for it would upset him grievously:

‘Did good by stealth
And blushed to find it fame!’

I think I must have dictated somewhere the best sermon on the ‘Company of Heaven’ I ever heard. The whole sermon was eight minutes. The preacher (whom the Roman Catholics would have made a missionary and sent to preach all over the globe) told this obscure congregation, of which I was a humble but absorbed listener, how exceedingly few in the whole Bible were the glimpses — and only glimpses — of the ‘Company of Heaven’. The best part of his sermon was how the Angels who always do their service in Heaven are appointed to succour and defend us here on Earth.

Of course it’s a platitude to say that Heaven is on Earth if our hearts are properly attuned.

..... (unfinished, as interrupted) the rest will follow.

Genesis, Ch. xlviii, verses 15-16.

Observe here, first of all, nothing is so exquisite in its convincing spirit as those words of Jacob:

‘God who has fed me all my life long unto this day.’ Wherefore, therefore, should he doubt the Good Providence that would continue to direct him, or have anxiety of anything that may come upon him.

However, that is not the allusion I wish to make. It is the words that follow:

‘And the Angel who redeemed me from evil, bless the lads.’

This is one of the ‘Company of Heaven’.

The fact is (as I told the VI Form at Eton, whom the villainous Headmaster suddenly brought round me to be talked to, and surreptitiously listened himself behind a screen without my knowing it) this ‘Company of Heaven’ without any specious telepathic reasonings can be imagined as actual realities by those who will but use the ‘Telescope of Faith’.

Miracles

‘Hezekiah turned his face to the wall’ (2 Kings, 20, 2).

‘Isaiah ordered a plaister of figs’ (Isaiah, 38, 21).

Lots of people nowadays don’t believe in miracles — not even Bishops! I do. I believe also in Angels. I believe Faith to be the

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greatest factor of the Universe. Faith permeates all things. As I told the Sixth Form at Eton, the tailor makes you a suit of clothes, but it is only with the firm faith that he is going to be paid for them!

On Sunday, the 5th of February at 5 p.m.,¹ two eminent but mutually differing practisers of the Healing Art left my bedside to catch the last train for London — 100 miles off — each with the firm conviction that he had seen the last of me. They both had done their best. At the same time arrived a beautiful nurse, with ruber aurum hair, sent by Dr. Hyla Greves, the eminent physician of Bournemouth, with instructions to her that I was a serious case ('The Last Phase!').

At 8 a.m. the next morning the beautiful nurse (I had not before seen) I discovered, on opening my eyes, at my bedside, with all her hair down. I thought it was an angel! Apparently I had gone off into a sound sleep without any of the adventitious aids of medical science, and awoke, temperature normal, pulse normal, taste returned, good appetite and no headache, and the nurse left for another place, where, poor thing, she died.

If all that wasn't a miracle, I don't know what is! It was as much of a miracle as when Lord Roberts said to Lord Kitchener, 'How do you account for the Marne?' Kitchener replied, 'Somebody must have been praying!'

One who knows says Kitchener was religious by conviction — as Dean Inge says, you can't teach religion, it is caught like the measles. This is not to disparage Sunday Schools or Holy Mothers, for it is right to plough the souls of the young so that the seed may germinate in a prepared heart, and when the Heavenly Influence comes (impalpable as a fragrance), it brings forth abundantly, and recognizes what a casual hearer misses in such a majestic symphony as:

If I be hungry will I tell thee?
All the beasts of the forest are Mine!
And so are the cattle upon a thousand hills!

And such an one also sees in the sunlit dewdrops more beauty than in the most sparkling diamond.

The hues may be of common earth
The lustre is of Heavenly Birth.

¹ He must have meant October 5th, 1917 (though not a Sunday), or some date about that time. See letter No. 451.

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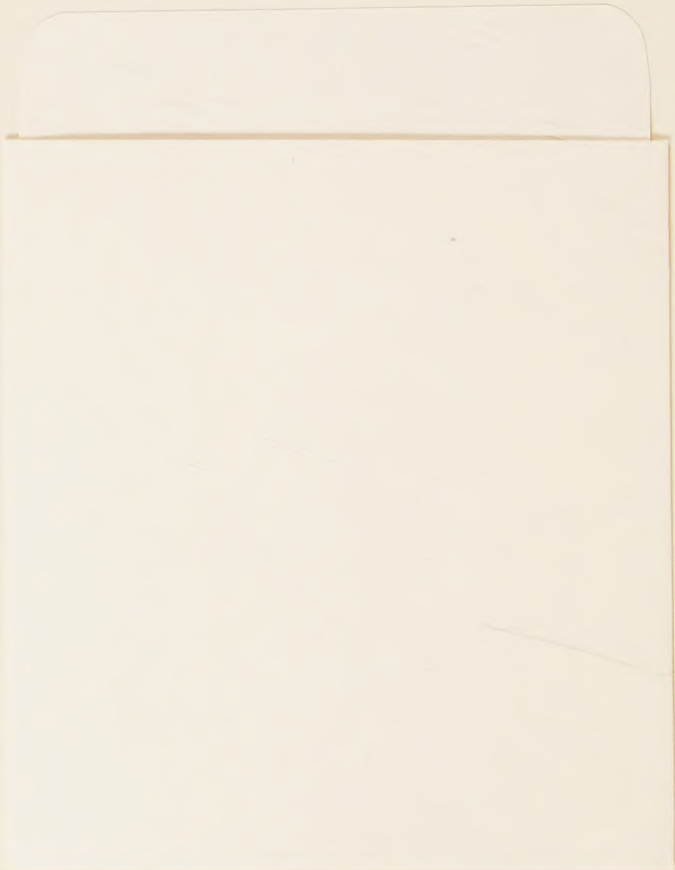
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‘“Jacky” Fisher was a profuse letter-writer, and this selection enables us to form a remarkably clear idea of what sort of man he really was. Moreover, it is not only the naval student or historian who will benefit from this book. Fisher’s interests and activities ranged over a very wide field. It is impossible for anyone to read them without feeling that he has been living on intimate terms with a very great man. The biographical introductions to each chapter give exactly the right amount of background to the letters which follow. We can look forward greatly to the appearance of the second volume.’ *ECONOMIST*

‘In the flavour and in the power of personality, Fisher was great, and it is all to be found in the letters here presented and annotated by Professor Marder, in a book which is a model of how such work should be done. The second volume of these letters will be awaited with lively interest.’ *NEW STATESMAN*

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